COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS

IBM PC, Amiga and CD-ROM

Issue 19 June 1992 £2.25

B-17 FLYING FORTRESS

Microprose rings the Memphis Belle

MULTI-PLAYER GAMING

The complete guide

ISSN 0955-4424

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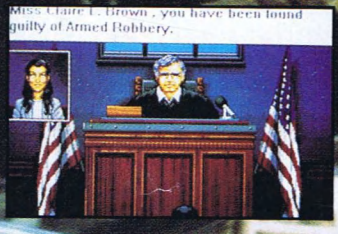
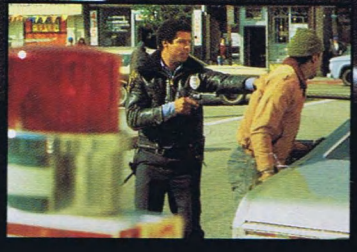
HILL STREET BLUES

THE COMPUTER GAME





HILL STREET BLUES is the most honored series in the history of television with the stunning accomplishment of 26 Emmy Awards and numerous other international awards.

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IBM VGA screens shown. Pictures of the actual TV series have been used with permission from MTM Production. Available for IBM PC/XT/AT, Tandy and 100% Compatibles with 512K and VGA/MCGA (256 colors), EGA (16 colors), Tandy (16 colors) or CGA. Supports Ad Lib and Soundblaster. Also available on AMIGA and ATARI ST. APPLE MACINTOSH version available soon. Visit your local dealer or call toll-free **1-800-783-8023**.

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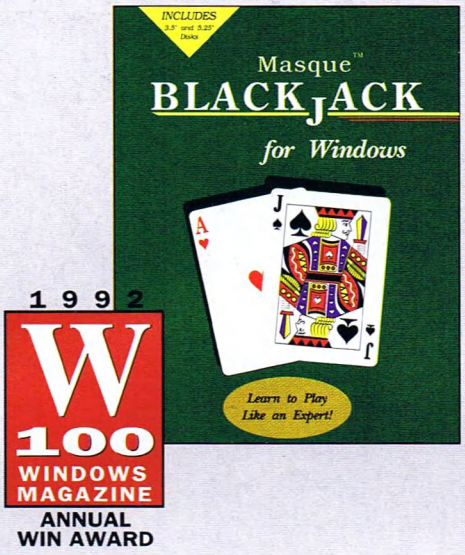
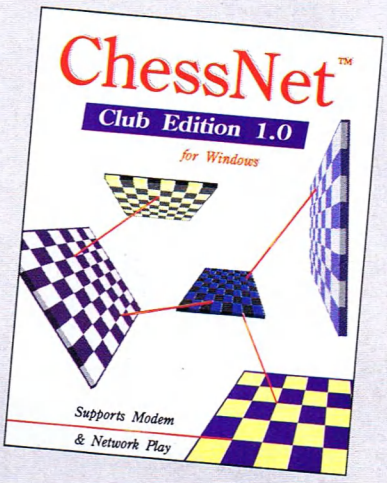
Windows ... great entertainment!





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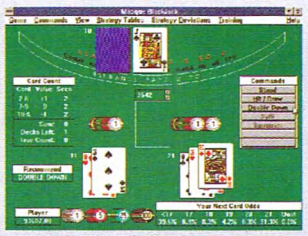
Voted One of the Top 100 Windows Products!

Windows Magazine

"Simply the best tool to help anyone learn the game."
Casino Player Magazine

Includes four complete strategies, by **Julian Braun**, encompassing basic and advanced play both for single and multiple deck, programmable house rules and game parameters, card counting and strategy practice drills, odds calculations, computer simulation, strategy error warnings and recordings, statistical evaluation of your play.



Split hand with hand values, card count, odds calculations and strategy recommendation windows displayed.

Strategy decision tables are graphically depicted in pop-up windows for easy mastering.

Play for fun or follow the Expert Play Recommendation to improve your skill and winnings.

Expert Strategy Tables show which of your current play options yield the best payoff average.

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"Now anyone with a personal computer can learn to play video poker like the experts!"
Card Player Magazine

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"This program does exactly what it says it will, and it does it beautifully. ChessNet ver. 2.0 is the standard others will attempt to duplicate."
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Features multi-level play against the computer or with friends across modems or networks and a "Chat" mode which allows you to send and receive messages while playing via modem or network. Save and resume games at any time, replay of moves or games to analyze variations with a scrolling move display, count down clocks for timed games or timed computer play, algebraic or coordinate notation and the 1990 World Chess Championship games which are included on disk. Single User or Club Edition.

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Play against the computer or against friends via modem or network.

The options menu shows some of the many game features.

Note: All screen displays are from Windows versions at VGA resolution.

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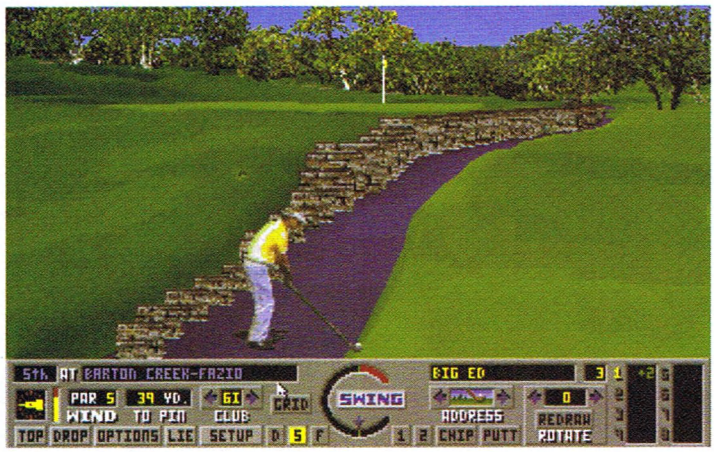
COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS

Number 19
June 1992
UK edition

He who plays, wins



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Earth has had 2 World Wars. You can have 4 billion.

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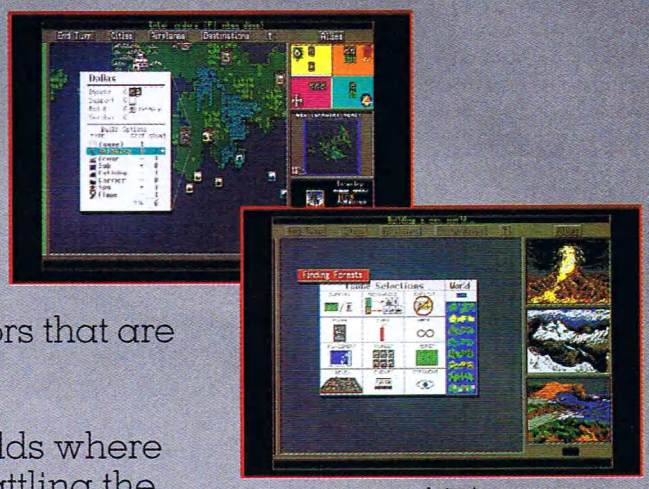
Do you crave a strategy game where the only thing you can expect is the unexpected? Then you're ready for Global Conquest from award-winning designer Dan Bunten!



From a state-of-the-art mobile command center, you'll direct land, sea, and air forces against 3 other military aggressors that are bent on planetary dominance!

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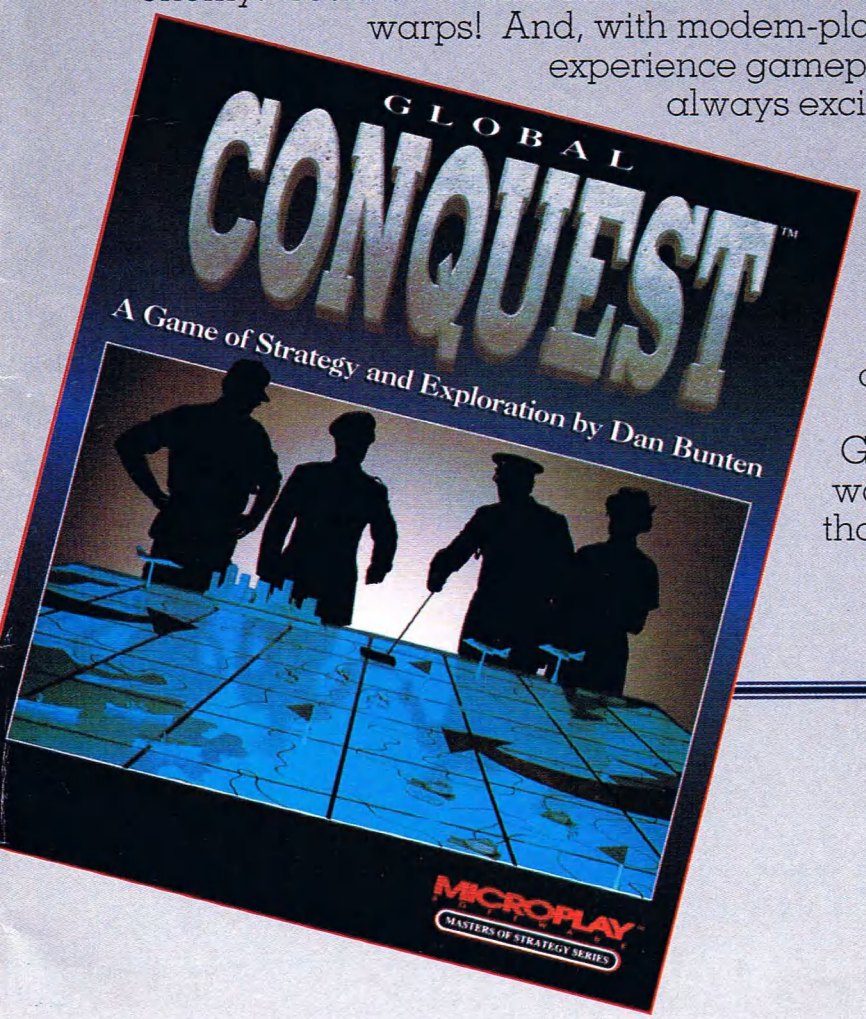

It's a thrilling challenge! But what else would you expect from the mind of Dan Bunten, the man who re-wrote the rules on strategy gaming with Command H.Q.™ and M.U.L.E.™?

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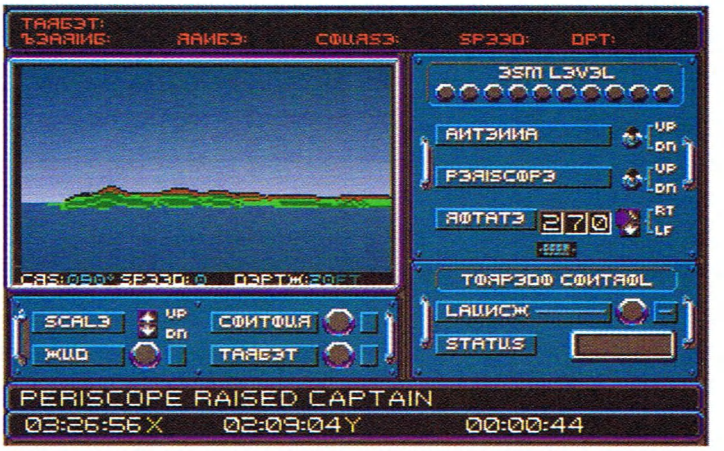

PETER GUNN: BE MY GUESS KZANOL
HITPOINTS 47
AC -6
LIGHT CROSSBOW +1
MAMA SLAYS HELPLESS THIEF WITH ONE CRUEL BLOW
THIEF GOES DOWN AND IS DYING
AUTO: ESC=MANUAL, ALT-M=MAGIC TOGGLE

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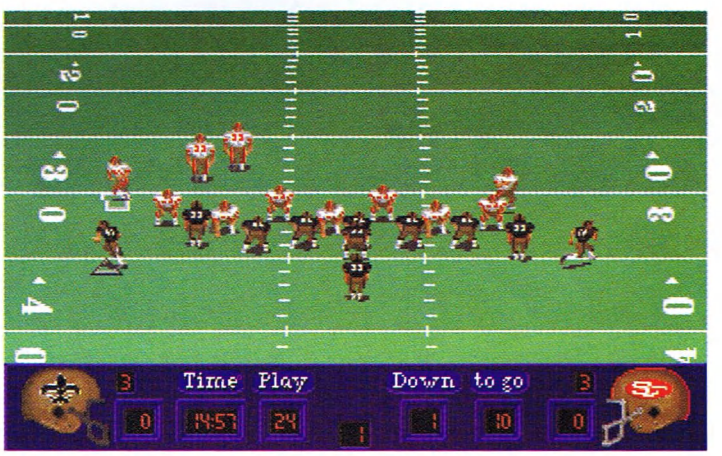
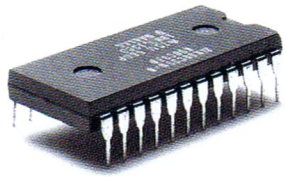
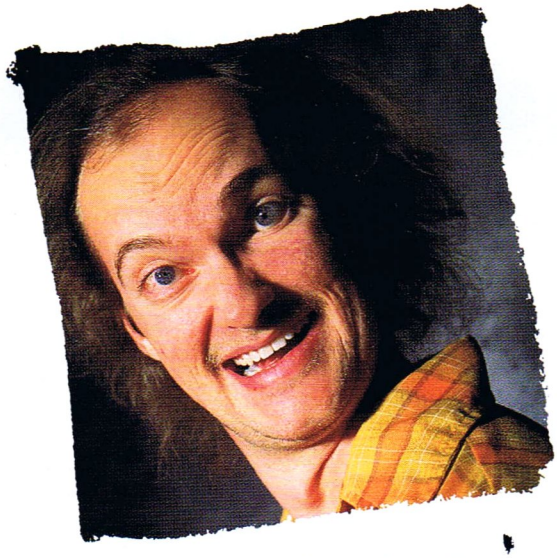




THIS OPPONENT IS PROGRAMMED TO BE CHALLENGING.



this one wants to rip your lungs out.

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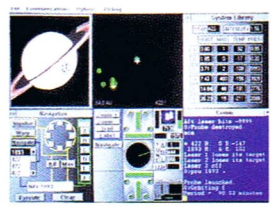

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This issue features our multi-player special, the backbone of which is modems

As someone who has been using modems since Hayes introduced its 300bps model as the cutting edge of technology in the early 1980s, I can state with conviction that a modem, once properly ensconced in a computer system, becomes as invisible and reliable as a telephone, and almost as crucial. With things set up right, the modem makes communication between the home computer and other computers, network services, online databases and world mainframe networks, all utterly transparent.

The problem is getting past the initial stage of modem anxiety. Like other similar technological fears, modem anxiety is primarily the end product of the systematic propaganda work engaged in by a techno-elite committed to ruling the world by mystifying the average user to the point that he thinks he'll require the services of a series of expensive (and expensively trained) professionals just to get started. Well, maybe not all that – but in any event, herewith a brief introduction meant to demystify the whole process. Read this and you'll be in business by noon tomorrow.

A modem, put simply, is just the kind of telephone a computer needs in order to call its friends. It's either a board which fits in a slot inside the computer (a seriously complicated process, which involves inserting the board in the slot), or a little box which connects by a cable to one of the serial ports on the computer (also a really complex process which requires deep plugging-in skills).

Like a telephone, a modem also needs to be connected to the phone line, and if the modem salesman is honest, the requisite connecting wire will be in the box along with the modem. Plug the phone line in at the modem end, at the wall outlet, and, voila! Everything's set!

Well, not quite. There are some little switches on the back of the modem/modem card (usually accessible from outside the computer box, fear not, even if it's a card) which need to be configured so that the modem is accessing the right communications port. On most IBM clones, that would be COM2 (COM1 is usually used by a mouse). Set those switches as the manual suggests for COM2, make sure if it's external that the modem's plugged into the COM2 serial port, and now we're ready to call Agnes to ask for the latest stock reports.

Well, almost. There's the software part. Some modems come with a version of Procomm, a former shareware modem program that will access the modem hardware from the computer. Procomm comes with its own little manual, a careful read of which will bring the whole happy process to a complete halt. Suffice it to say that all that's necessary is knowledge of what speed modem is being used, and what communications port it's connected to (we already took care of the latter).

Modems come at different baud rates (nothing to do with the price of doxies), which are the rates at which the modem hardware can transmit data over the phone line. Currently, 2400 baud is the recommended minimum, 9600 is an ideal investment for the near future, and faster than that is important only if massive amounts of financial data need to be lifted wholesale from the London Stock Exchange.

Telling the software program in its configuration screen what baud rate the modem works at, and what COM port it's connected to, is almost all the information it will need to know. Most networks use 8 bits of data and 1 stop bit for transmission at full duplex; what that all means is unimportant, just set things up that way and chances are good that now everything will be peachy. Find a number which a network, BBS or other computer uses, tell the software to dial it, and welcome to the world of inter-computer data communication.

There are many brands of modem out there, some costing literally five times as much as others which essentially do the same thing. The difference in price has mainly to do with the guaranteed integrity of the data being transmitted; very high quality modems selling for $500 are mainly for places like banks, which might close down a small country's economy for a week should they drop the wrong bits in the process of transmission across a noisy phone line.

For gaming purposes, the no-name cheapie models will do. To go somewhere between those extremes, the modems made by Practical Peripherals, Supra, Avatex/Promodem and US Robotics/Miracom Couriers will all do just fine; they're likely to be more noise-resistant than the cheaper models (and thus freer of errors in transmission, those things that can scramble a data connection and require a quick hang-up and re-dial to get things flowing again), yet cheap enough to prove a reasonable investment for the long haul.

With a good modem and the right software, the world is open to any user who wants it; there are a number of major networks, like Compuserve, Genie and Cix, as well as a wide range of independents, that offer extensive varieties of games-playing as well as important information access options in a number of fields.

Compuserve, for instance, has Grolier's Encyclopedia and Peterson's Guide to US Colleges online all the time, obviating the need to buy home CD-ROM copies. In the future, massive databases such as these might well serve as international libraries rivalling the biggest and best currently present. Get a modem and get ready to access.

Steven Wartofsky

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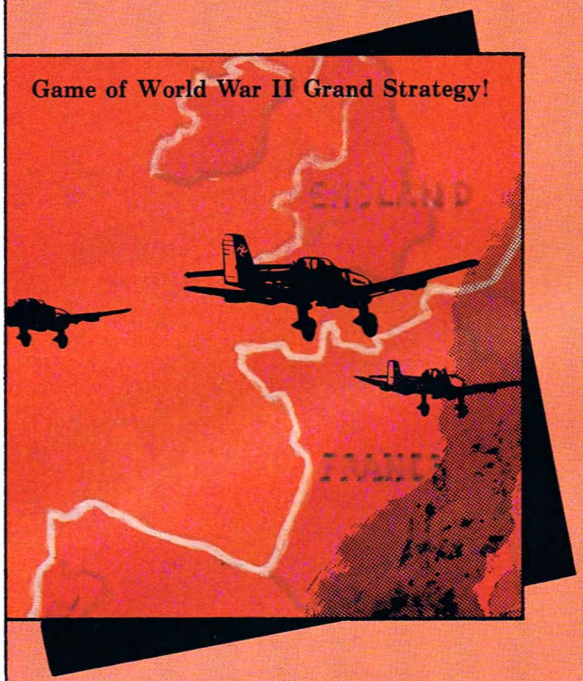


World War II, the conquest of Europe...

Out of the ashes and turmoil of post-World War I Europe an Austrian artist rose from obscurity to command the greatest military machine ever known to man. His name was Adolph Hitler. He and his band of Nazi cutthroats promised a starving German people revenge for the injustices of World War I and a Reich that would last for a thousand years.

Gaining absolute power in 1934, Hitler embarked upon the return of Germany to her previous place of prominence with massive rearmament programs. First Austria, then Czechoslovakia fell under the Nazi boot.

The west viewed the German rise to power with growing alarm, and when Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, Britain and France declared war.

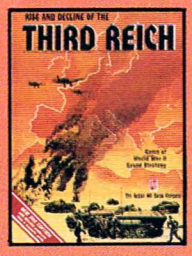
The stage was set for a war of such magnitude that it could only be compared to the greatest of natural disasters.

Computer Wargaming like you've never seen it!

It's more than a game, *it is the definitive historical simulation of Europe during World War II.* All the elements: *military, economic, geographical, ideological* and *chronological* are included in the game. Until now, **Third Reich** has been a game for the truly dedicated boardgamer. Recent advances in electronics now make it possible to put all of the rich detail of the boardgame into your home computer.

COMPUTER THIRD REICH includes the following:

- State of the art graphics.
- Easy to use interface.
- Choice of human or computer opponents for either side.
- Three historical scenarios plus the campaign game.
- Advanced SAVE GAME function to make play-by-mail easier.



COMPUTER THIRD REICH system requirements: Commodore Amiga: Amiga 500-3000 (including 1000) with one meg of RAM and color monitor. Atari ST: 520, 1040, or Mega with at least 512K RAM, double side disk drive and color monitor. (Single-side version for 520 available upon request.) See what all this excitement is all about.

Computer Third Reich is available for $39.95. Please add $6.00 shipping and handling (Canadian orders $12.00; overseas $18.00). IBM PC/PS and compatibles version is coming soon.

Get **Computer Third Reich** wherever great computer games are sold, or direct from:

Strategy Magazine had this to say: "The point and click interface is a pleasure to use...The map graphics themselves are excellent...At first I thought this new version would be too simple for the Third Reich player and too complex for the newcomer. Six hours play changed this viewpoint."

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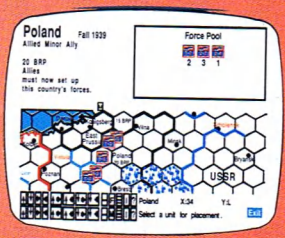

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Microsoft links with Access

FOLLOWING its huge success with Windows 3.0 (total estimated sales: 12 million), Microsoft has been looking to diversify into other areas.

Recent rumours have had the company linked with everyone from Nintendo to Mickey Mouse. The truth, however, can now be revealed: Microsoft has signed an agreement with Access Software, the results of which will be seen shortly in **Microsoft Golf**.

In essence this will be a souped-up Windows 3.0 version of Access's best selling golf game **Links**. The Windows connection means that all the features, such as top-down views and stance adjustments, will now be able to be displayed on the screen at the same time. All the courses currently available for **Links** will be compatible with the Microsoft game, which will come with the Torrey Pines course.

For its part, Access is set to release **Links 386 Pro**. As the title suggests, this has been designed to run on a 386 configuration minimum. Super VGA is also mandatory. **Links 386 Pro** will have brand new courses, starting with Harbour Town, that will have a textured terrain rather than the pixels favoured by the earlier courses, though these will be compatible.

Other new features include: a skins tournament, female golfers, and a facility that will allow users to log-on to, (via a modem) the Computer Sports Network on which weekly tournaments are held. After 'signing on', players complete a round then leave their scorecard at the 'desk'. Results are announced on weekly basis.

There will also be a file transfer facility which enables players to modem saved files to opponents, who may then copy the file into their game and play the same round attempting to obtain a better score.

Another new feature is the stats database in which all scores per hole, and scores per round are saved. Although not strictly Windows 3.0 compatible, **Links 386 Pro** will come with its own windowing system which, like Microsoft's GUI, will enable multiple screens to be displayed at the same time. These 'windows' may be customised in 345 different permutations.

Access describes the program as 'multi-media aware'. A full blown multimedia version on CD ROM and with stereo sound will be available late summer.

The original courses will be compatible with **Links 386 Pro**, though Access's Steve Witzel says that once users see the new courses, the original courses are likely to take a back seat. Probably the next course to be released after Harbour Town will be the Mauna Kea course on the Kona Coast, Hawaii. According to a puzzled Witzel, 'more people went on the "shoot" for that course than on all the other courses put together'.

Amiga rams it home

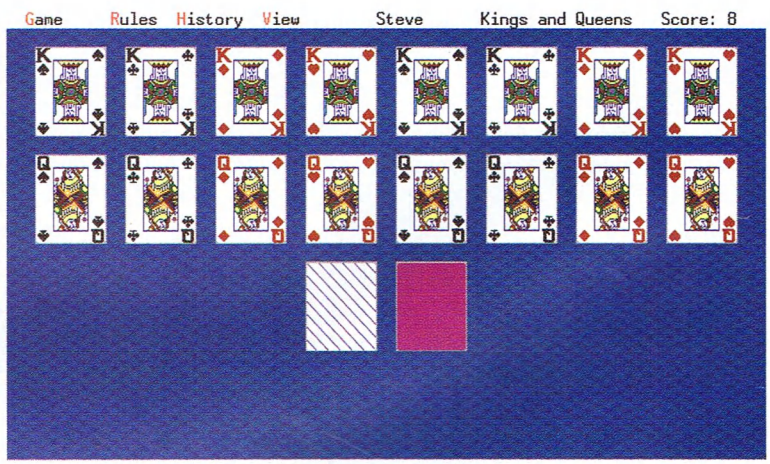
COMMODORE'S latest addition to its hardware family will be the A600. This will come with 1Mb of installed RAM and a smart card slot.

The smart card is seen as an effort to combat the piracy that has plagued the machine, especially in Europe. When a game on the card is loaded some of the memory remains on the card, thus preventing 'back-ups'.

The chip will be the same 68000 chip that comes with the A500 and A500P, so what's the difference between the A600 and the A500P apart from the smart card extension? Come in Commodore: 'It will have a smaller case, but other than that we are not prepared to comment at this time.'

Despite the taciturn nature of Commodore's 'publicity department', we can reveal that the A600 will be one third smaller than the A500, have a built in TV modulator and, good news for gamers, there will be an optional 20Mb hard disk available for an extra $160 (£100).

The retail price for the A600, which is due to ship this summer, is expected to be the same as that of the A500.



One more for the road

THE latest release from QQP, publisher of **The Perfect General** and **The Lost Admiral**, is the somewhat different **Solitaire's Journey**.

This game offers variants on the classic card game, no less than 105 in total. In addition to keeping track of individual player averages, the last 25 games played are displayed in a colourful chart.

There is also a set of sub games in the program – for example, in one of these players explore a mansion playing solitaire in each room, and collecting gold as they progress.

In the cross-country quest, players journey across the USA. To earn money for transportation costs, solitaire tournaments are played in each city. Earnings depend on the result. The more money earned, the quicker the journey. **Solitaire's Journey** should be available for the PC now.

QQP has also signed a European licensing agreement with Ubisoft for **The Perfect General.**

CD Genny wings it shock!

ORIGIN Systems has signed a deal with Sega which will see **Wing Commander** ported to its upcoming CD machine. But how is this possible you ask? After all, you've plonked down the best part of your life savings for a PC just to be able to play the game. The answer, dear friends, lies in the specs.

The processor in the base unit (an 8MHz 68000) can be used in parallel with the CPU in the CD. It's tricky, but doing this makes the Sega CD combo equivalent to a fast 286 PC with graphics similar to an Amiga using half-brite mode (pseudo-64 colours). There is a DAC on board the Genesis for speech and an FM chip for music (similar to the Adlib).

All this makes the Sega CD a decent multimedia machine for less than $500 (current plans are for the Genesis to be $150 and the CD to be $300). It beats the heck out of CDTV or CDI, each of which boasts a meagre 8MHz 68000, and it's affordable – something you can't say about a PC with a CD-ROM (MPC) which will run to $2000 minimum.

All this puts the Super Nintendo (SNES) in an interesting situation. Originally Nintendo planned on beating Sega on price alone. The SNES is $180, but the SNES CD would be $200. Since the SNES has better graphics modes (256-colour mode, for instance), this might have worked.

The hitch was the processor. The SNES processor is a slow 65816 running at less than 3MHz – basically it's a poor Apple IIGS. Yuck!

Already there have been complaints about the 'slow down' in SNES games. A slow-down is when the action on the screen slows dramatically (sometimes to a crawl) because the CPU is overloaded. It takes the wind out of your sails when you've been zipping around the screen, like listening to an old 45 at 33.

But everything has now changed. Nintendo got the stuffing beaten out of it this Christmas by the Genesis. People saw **Sonic** on the Genny and **Super Mario** on the SNES and chose wisely.

Surprisingly, Nintendo reacted in a positive way: it changed its plans.

After reviewing the technical spec on the SNES CD we can report what it has come up with is a 21MHz 16-bit CPU (unspecified, but rumour has it that it will be a RISC-like chip), 1Mb of RAM, and a CD-XA chip for streaming audio and video – this will also make it compatible with Philips CD-I player.

Nintendo still plans on releasing this at $200. If this price holds up, the SNES CD + SNES combo is about the equivalent of a 386SX with VGA. You could do real games on that – flight sims, strategy games, virtual reality, you name it and all for less than $400. It'll arrive in 1993, but still that's not bad.

Still, all this is good news for gamers if it means Sega and Nintendo are being forced to offer more capabilities.

So why is this important? Well, in the past there were two big limitations on putting decent computer games on video game systems: CPU and storage. The RAM limitations could be dealt with, but the other two were big. The CPU problem is obvious. The best video games machine going right now (the Genesis) is basically an Amiga 500, which is not good enough.

The storage problem is less obvious. Videogames have previously been shipped on ROM cartridges. These are expensive ($20 to the manufacturer!) and hold only a limited amount of data. A really big one holds 1Mb, and some hold 1.5Mb. Now look at **Wing Commander II** sitting at better than 10Mb compressed.

These new CD add-ons boost the storage (a CD holds 540Mb or more) *and* the CPU. So it is possible to expect something like **Wing Commander** on a Sega or SNES CD.

PC owners need not too much about the love of their life being usurped – the installed user base is far way high for that to happen overnight. However, anyone thinking about buying a machine specifically for games is clearly going to have consider these developments.

Virgin's tempting offer

LURE of the Temptress is the first game from Revolution software to use its 'virtual theatre' engine. This aims to create a 'real world' environment in which non-player characters operate independently both of each other and the primary character.

The story is that of Diermot, but it was decided that 'Diermot's Story' would not be much of a title so they called it **Lure of the Temptress**.

Diermot's story is that he gets captured by the Skorls and then lured by the eponymous temptress. Lucky Diermot. It can be safely assumed that lots of things happen to Diermot during the telling of this tale, even if we have no idea what they are.

Lure of the Temptress should be released in the US by Konami and in the UK by Virgin Games on all formats anytime now.

THE CONVERTED

Knights of the Sky (Microprose), ST, PC version reviewed issue 5

Captive, PC

Speedball 2 (Konami), PC, Amiga version reviewed issue 8

Moonstone, PC

Wing Commander (Origin), Amiga and CDTV

Warlords (SSG), Mac, PC version reviewed issue 6

No Greater Glory (SSI), Mac, PC version reviewed issue 14

Might and Magic III (New World), Amiga, PC version reviewed issue 11

Pools of Darkness (SSI), Amiga, PC version reviewed issue 13

Matrix Cubed (SSI), Amiga, PC version reviewed issue 18

Eye of the Beholder II (SSI), Amiga, PC version reviewed issue 17

Moi belle

I wanted to congratulate *Strategy Plus* for a super April issue. The combination of sharp reviews and a great British wit really makes this magazine unique.

One letter to the editor described the magazine as an American magazine produced by the British. I'm not quite sure what that means – is it a compliment or a slam?

The highlights of the issues were a good examination of **Populous 2** and **Civilization**, along with the other reviews. Another feature was the editor's visit to the Las Vegas CES show, but he will just have to tell us about his list of credits in preparing his report – like what did Michelle from Caesar's Palace contribute?

John O'Leary
Atlanta GA 30036
USA

Michelle contributed that rarest of commodities in Las Vegas: a genuine smile.

Harpoon rising

I was wondering if there were any groups or individuals who create scenarios for the Amiga version of **Harpoon** using the scenario editor, and who wish to sell or exchange disks containing said scenarios.

Although I like the scenario editor, I don't think that there is a complete element of surprise when playing a self-designed scenario.

Paul Mellor
36 Gray St
Elsecar
Barnsley
S74 8JP UK

If you have a modem try logging on to the UK Harpoon Scenario Warehouse on 0689 824666 (8-N-1), which has an excellent selection of scenarios available for downloading. I'm sure our readers are able to help also, aren't you readers?

Embattled

I was a little dismayed by Brian Walker's review of **Battle Isle** in the February edition of *Strategy Plus*. In my own humble opinion I found this to be a very challenging and addictive strategy game.

The joystick control, though a little tricky, is easily mastered and becomes second nature. The combat is, in my limited experience, quite novel and I would say, fair and realistic. For Brian Walker to say that he 'hadn't got a clue' can only mean that he hadn't played the game (not a decent length of time anyway).

I would agree that the short 'arcade type screen' is a little unconventional, but the reviewer completely missed the point that this *is* the combat report. The thing that is illogical is that the reviewer has not grasped this quite simple concept.

The split screen does take a little getting used to, but the game is very chess-like with wooden pieces, and you get to see your opponent's side of the board in that game, don't you?

The reviewer's comment that he found the game 'tedious', though perfectly valid for it's own purposes, has obviously coloured his judgment to the detriment of other potential players.

Ian Wilson
Snodland, Kent
ME6 5QN UK

Sound but no fury

I recently bought Spectrum Holobyte's **Falcon 3.0**, and while I was able to get the sound though my Sound Blaster I could get nothing when I go to the war room or config screens.

Also, the mouse will only move from the left side to the centre and not to the right, and the keyboard will move the cursor to the right, but the 'enter' command will not respond on any of the right-hand screen.

Hoping you can help and explain in plain English, as I am new to the world of PCs.

B Evans
Kirkby
Merseyside
L32 0SH UK

Spectrum Holobyte has recently brought out a 'patch' disk that will cure some of the problems you describe.

The version being released in the UK by Microprose will include this upgrade, though it has also agreed to offer the patch free to users who bought the import version. For more info call Microprose Technical Support on: 0666 504326.

We are also working with Spectrum Holobyte to produce a Q&A article on the game. This will attempt to resolve some of the most asked questions about the program.

Jesus saves

I have read three issues of your magazine. I am very impressed with the careful review technique and concise well written prose that comprises the editorial. I shall in all likelihood continue to buy and read your magazine since it offers a more balanced outlook then 'another cloned editorial'.

I have been concerned with your editorial responses to some of the letters, however. I am a practising Christian and I believe that if more people actually looked at what Jesus said and did, rather than at the popular myth, they would see he was a radical itinerant with far more than passing significance.

It is not my purpose here, though, to evangelise the editorial staff and readers of *Strategy Plus*. What concerns me is that your answers to a couple of letters from Christians have been personal attacks rather than 'honest replies'. Do you really feel that computer gaming is not suitable for anyone who believes in God?

Mark Brackley
Somerton
Somerset
TA11 6NA UK

I recently bought my first and last copy of your magazine. I have no idea what prompted the correspondence on sexism, but the reply to C Scott's letter not only answers none of his questions, but is totally muddle-headed.

Sexism mainly concerns not the 'activity known as sex', but the different treatment of people according to their gender.

You state that editorial policy is to publish adverts 'irrespective of the prevailing wind of ideology'. Just as well then that racist ads are illegal isn't it, otherwise you'd go right ahead and publish those too.

Now, the real point of this letter. Referring to someone as 'poofy' isn't big. it just shows enormous contempt for your gay readers. John Scott has no business airing his prejudices in game reviews. I'm an ordinary bloke who's gay and likes computer games. I don't expect to see insults in computer games magazines that I buy.

Eric Eagle
London
N19 3NW UK

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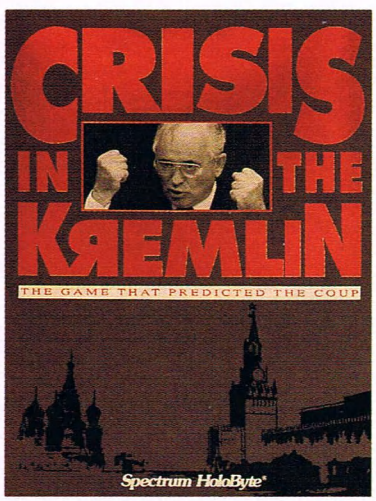

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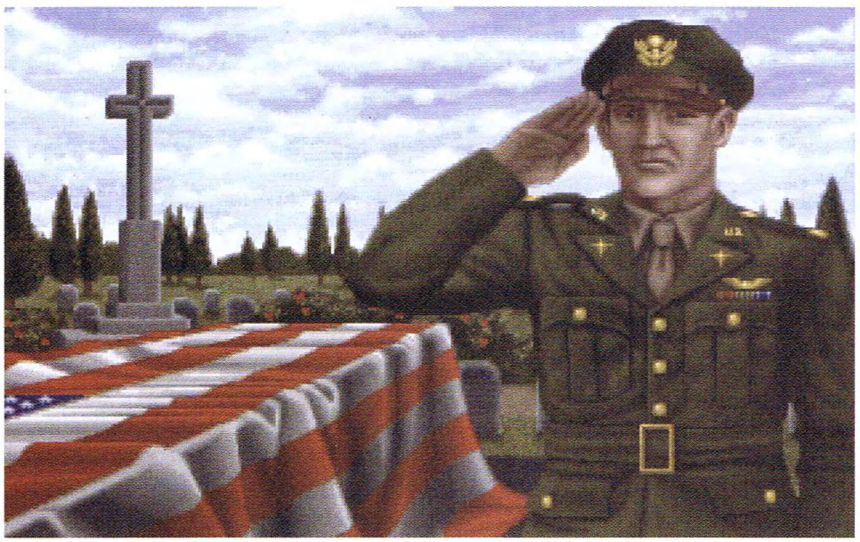


B17 FLYING FORTRESS

Paul Rigby previews Microprose's B-17 Flying Fortress

Talking to friends and colleagues, one of the highlights of Lucasfilm's **Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe** was having the opportunity to fly the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress. The main reason was that simulations which use large aircraft are few and far between.

Those same people are now popping champagne corks because they've just heard the news that Microprose is to devote a entire simulation to this veritable hero of the skies. Known, cunningly, as **B-17 Flying Fortress** the game will be released on all 16-bit formats (PC and Amiga for sure, and 99% sure on the ST front).

The premise to the simulation is to hand-pick a specialised crew, cram them into the said B-17 (a 'G' model with the added chin turret) and try to emulate the crew of that star of the silver screen, *Memphis Belle*, by completing the required 25 missions that constitutes a full tour.

Missions, which all take place during daylight hours, will vary from hitting factories and industrial areas to low-level attacks on submarine pens. 'You will be given a primary mission, but if the weather is too bad then you will be given an alternative,' noted the game's designer, Mike Brunton.

There are about 150 areas that can be bombed. But it is likely that the player will be assigned a specific area to bomb rather than taking a random choice.

'We might put an option in where you can decline missions if you wish,' offered Peter Woods, who was in charge of quality assurance on the project. 'That hasn't been finalised, yet, and is really a game play tweak depending on whether it is found to be a real pain in the ass if, for example, you are always getting long, laborious missions. We may decide to work in a sort of difficulty level-type thing where the higher level you select the worst areas you have to bomb. But that is something we can play about with.'

At the moment the player is unable to influence the 'campaign' during the tour to the bitter end. That is, the player cannot change the final result of the war, as in **SWOTL** for example. Woods, however, did add that: 'The plan is, the more successful you are will affect the campaign as to where the war moves to, and exactly where you bomb to give the game some sort of realism. A bit like **Knights of the Sky**, it gives people a better feeling of actually "being there".'

There is the possibility of continuing past the 25 mission mark to fly further tours, possibly for a higher rank or that previously unattainable medal.

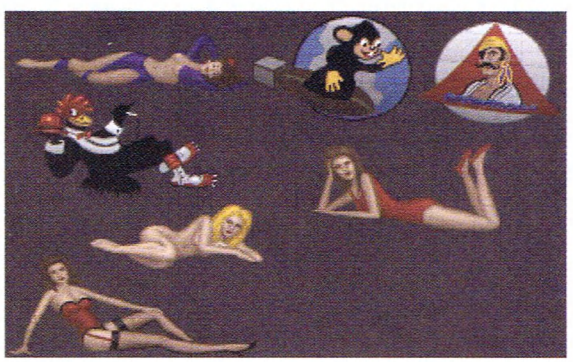
'But really, the main point of the game and the American crew's tour of duty over here is to complete the 25 missions – that was the magical figure,' asserted Woods. An important aspect of the game is the crew, who essential to the success of the tour.

'They all have separate skills,' commented Woods. 'They are good at certain things, bad at other things. They will be replaced as they are killed but the replacements will not be as capable.'

In fact each crew-member will improve his skills as the tour progresses. Each member of the crew has a set of statistics but they cannot be seen directly. 'I'm not a believer of giving people numbers if they are unrealistic,' said Brunton.

Feedback that the crew is improving will appear via a personnel report that depicts the crew's faces within a black & white photograph. 'If someone is injured and unable to continue the campaign then he fades out of the photograph and a new guy fades in,' stated Brunton.

Even though these computer-controlled characters do their job well, the player is able to flick from position to position to take control at the most critical periods. 'It's a bit like **M1 Tank Platoon**,' said Woods, 'where you



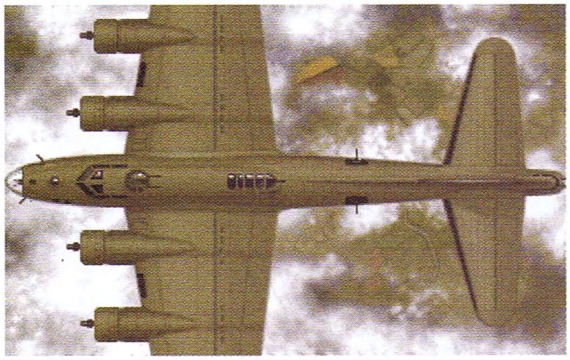
can take control of the guns or, if you leave them alone, they'll return to computer control.'

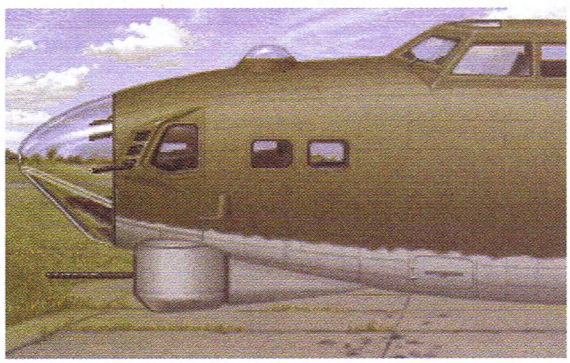
'If the crew member is unconscious you can ask another crew member to move through the aircraft to take up that position,' added Mike Brunton, 'once they're there you can issue instructions to them such as 'man the guns', 'apply first aid', 'drop the bombs' and so on.'

The upshot is that one can order the co-pilot back to be the rear gunner in the event of the latter coming to grief. Obviously, however, the co-pilot's job is that of flying. His gunnery will, more than likely, be sub-standard.

'The hope is,' remarked Brunton, 'that people will choose to be the most interesting bits at the most interesting times. So, if you want to, you can be the pilot when you take off, then you can be the top-gunner, then you can be the ball-gunner, then you can switch to the tail-gunner, then you can be the navigator for a bit and check on your progress [which shows the map table and a grease pencil mark that moves across the map to signify the plane's progress].

'As the radio operator, you are, basically, another gunner, because he had a gun in his station. In the bombardier's position you're a gunner in the chin turret. At the target you can then go to the bomb position and look through the bomb-sight to drop the bombs.'





Unfortunately the artificial intelligence has not been extended to other aircraft. It would have been nice, for example, to be able to interact with the other bombers in the pack during the flight to a particular target and back. Also, there will be escort fighters (Mustangs, I presume). Again, however, there will be no chance of contact. It's not essential, sure, but it would have been appreciated in a game where team-work is paramount.

One pleasing feature of the game is the addition of a layered damage control system. That is, the aircraft will not experience a 'five hits and the player is shot out of the sky' situation. In **B-17** engine(s) may be hit and destroyed or they may catch fire. Any fires that are not countered may spread, resulting in the wing melting and breaking off. The player can attempt to use the extinguisher systems. There will be aileron failures, rudder failures and so on.

'It is possible to send somebody back through the aircraft to lower the undercarriage manually if the hydraulics are out, for example,' said Brunton. 'We are setting it up so that if the flaps go out the aircraft performance will alter; if the ailerons jam then it'll tend to pull one way or another.

B-17s did get home with horrendous damage. I've seen photographs of a B-17 where the nose has totally gone and another where the tail had virtually disappeared or has a huge hole in one wing. But that is the exception rather than the norm in the game, as it was in real life.

Woods commented on the accuracy of the flight model: 'The B-17 actually does feel like it has weight to it. It doesn't fly like a fighter or anything like that. It feels like you are flying 25 tonnes of aeroplane.'

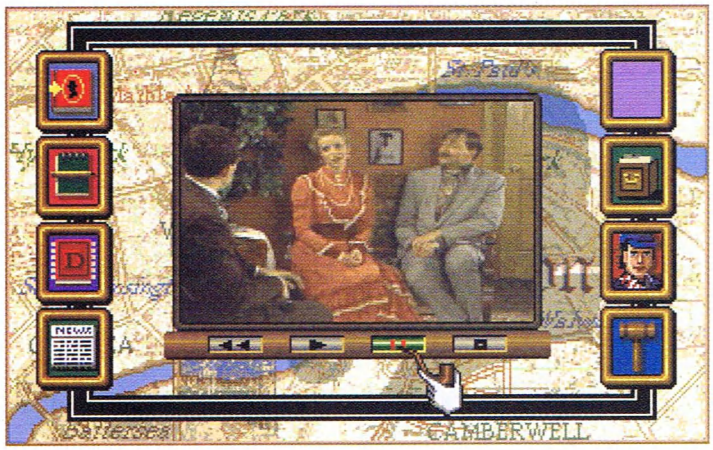
Other aspects of the aircraft are simplified to some extent. The bomb load is standardised as Brunton explained: 'We haven't worried about the real bomb-loads that they carried. You always carry 10 500lb bombs. You never worry about the mixes of loads they used to carry like incendiaries, very large bombs and that kind of stuff.'

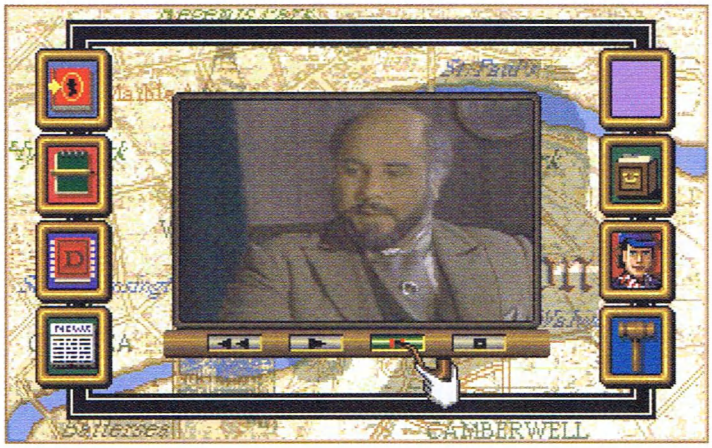
From what I saw, things like navigation are 'made easy' as are the gunnery positions. The gun sights are good quality, the ammunition, for example, does not have to be re-loaded.

Welcome gimmicks include the option of naming one's own plane (names are registered below the cockpit framing) and the choice of nose-art, visible flak and so on. 'We've got 16 different decals [nose art] to choose from,' said Woods.

Also, Microprose has reported that it has included a fairly wide list of 8th Air Force bases, so if and when missions are completed there was will be choice of aerodromes on which to land.

B-17 Flying Fortress, which is scheduled for release this summer, continues a welcome fashion, initiated by Three-Sixty's **Megafortress**, of simulating large aircraft – aircraft that have previously, been tagged 'boring' with little promise of exciting game play. **Megafortress** proved them all wrong, of course. Let us hope that Microprose continues along this line too, so encouraging others to venture into this exciting area of flight simulation. ❑



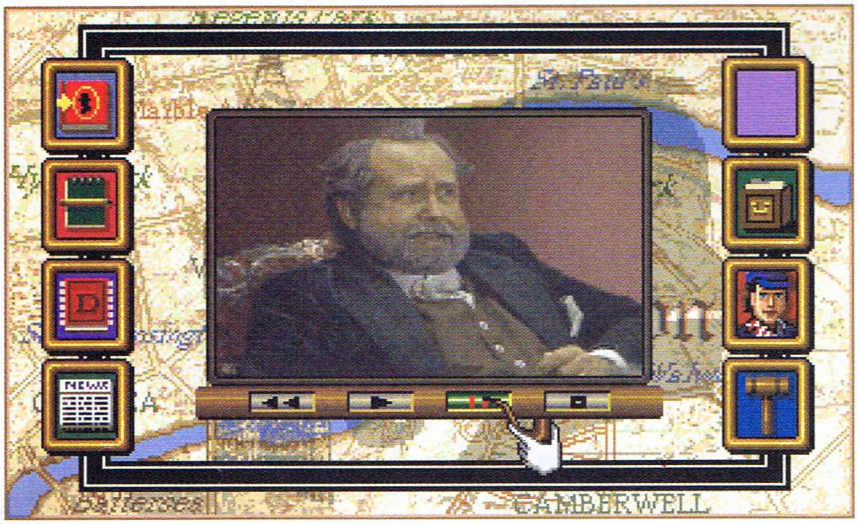


SHERLOCK HOLMES CONSULTING DETECTIVE

Brian Walker gets interactive

Is this the future? 'Elementary,' Watson would reply if he had the chance to view **Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective**, the new CD ROM game from ICOM Corporation and Software Toolworks in which the good doctor and his smarter partner are immortalised.

This is the first program that begins to justify the buzz term 'interactive movie'. Arriving on CD ROM only, **SHCD** was actually produced like a movie: for the video portion of the game, a writer was hired for the screenplay, 50 speaking parts were cast, more than 70 costumes were designed specifically for the production, and 25 Victorian era sets were built. Altogether there are 90 minutes of full motion video on show.



The interface that is used to propel the characters is icon driven and through this, Holmes and the ever trusty Watson may be guided to various points in search of clues. The London Library and Somerset House are just two of many locations featured in the game, the title of which may be familiar to whose memories stretch back to boardgames.

Originally **Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective** was a pencil and paper game that won several awards, its modular system managing to include telephone directories and fingerprint files among its esoteric components. In 1989 the ICOM Corporation licensed the computer rights to the title from Sleuth Publications. The subsequent production was headed by ICOM's director of creative development, Ken Tarrolla, who at the time was looking into ways of using new technologies.

'I hired a scriptwriter and we started working on a storyboard in November 1989,' he said. 'By February 1990 we had it finished. It wasn't really too difficult as we were using the cases from the boardgame as source material.'

The next task for Team Tarrolla was to find actors willing to participate in what was then, and indeed still is, an infant technology. For this he went to the Nuts Agency in Minneapolis, though no significance should be read into this choice. Once the cast members were assembled work could start on the period costumes that had to be designed. The budget for the production was $1m, though this was to cover all platforms, and for that amount one would indeed hope so.

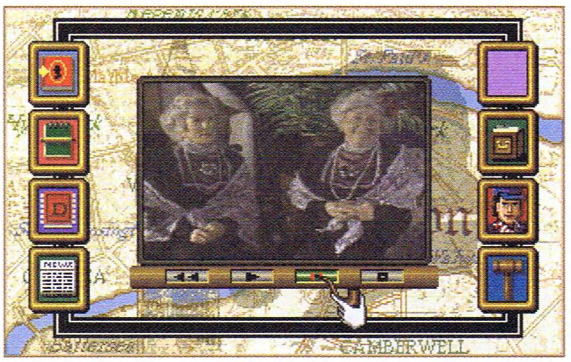
'The actual shoot on video only took six weeks,' Tarrolla told me, 'though they were a pretty frantic six

weeks. We shot on analogue video and then grabbed and digitally sourced each frame.'

The game made its first appearance on the now legendary Fujitsu FM Towns machine (which comes with an on-board CD ROM drive) and more surprisingly the Turbo Grafix and the PC Engine.

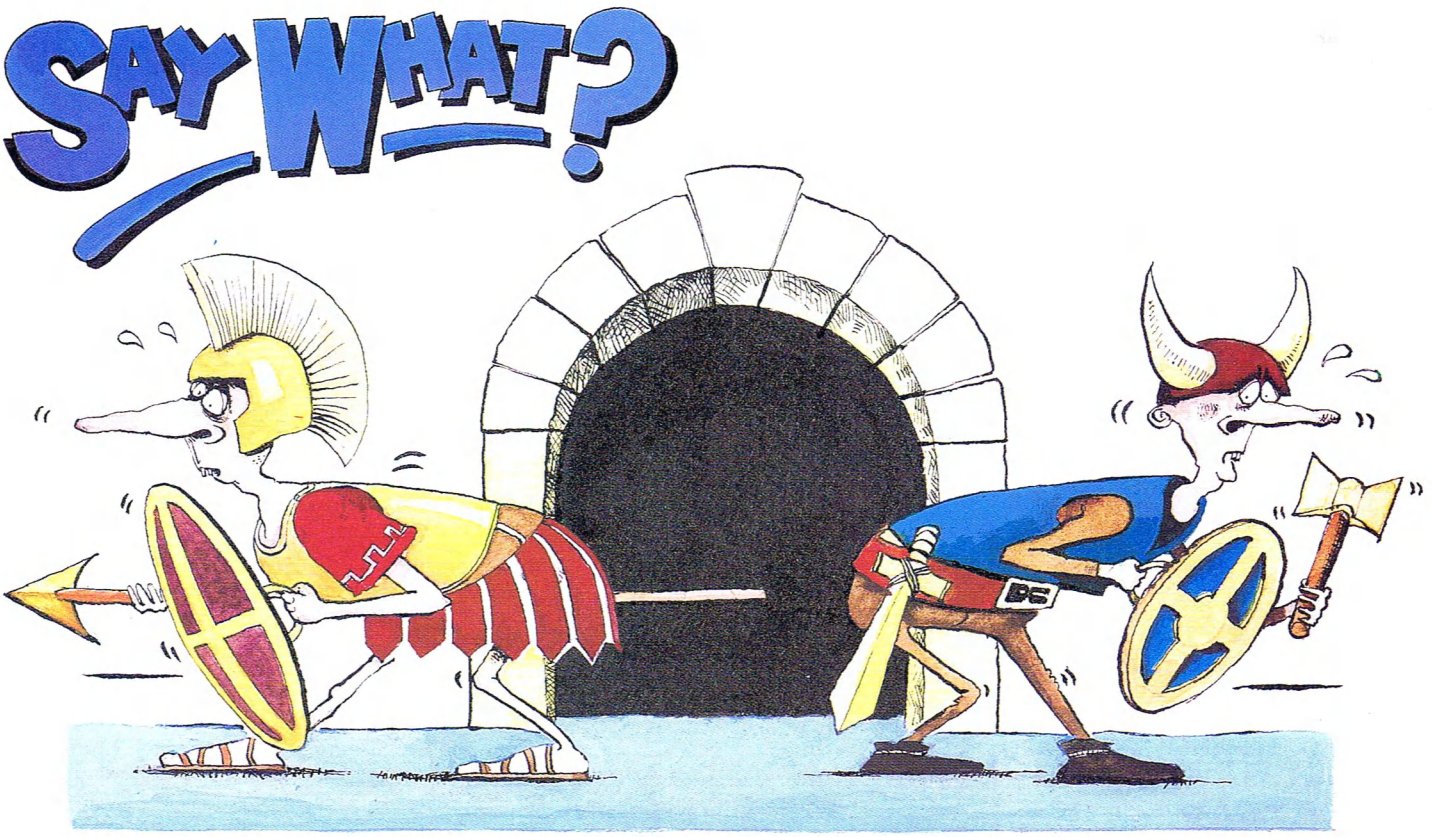
'At the time these were the only machines capable of handling what we were trying to achieve,' said Tarrolla. 'Our long term aim was to port them onto CD ROM drives for the PC and Mac where we felt they would find their 'natural' market. Our target machine for the PC market is a 286/12 with a MPC compatible CD ROM drive. The multimedia extensions won't be necessary: users can just plug their audio lead into the headphone extension on the CD ROM drive to get good quality sound.'

The cases featured on the first disk are The Case of the Mummy's Curse, The Case of the Mystified Murderess, and The Case of the Tin Soldier. To win each game, players must go before the judge and correctly identify the murderer(s) and the individual motives for each murder. If the answer is incorrect then a return to the scene of the crime is in order. Points are scored based on the number of clues seen or heard during the mystery.

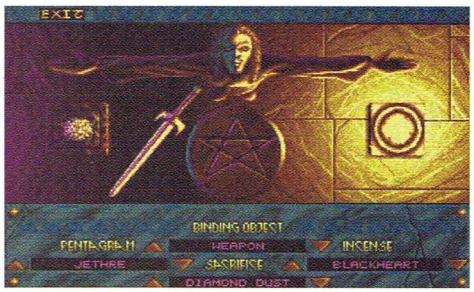


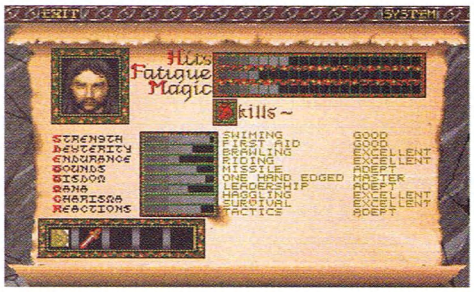
Players may opt to accompany the master sleuth as he seeks out solutions, but will be penalised with a low score. The alternative is to compete against Holmes himself and attempt to solve the case before him. Dr Watson will be helping players with their enquiries. ❑

***Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective** will be published by The Software Toolworks for CD ROM Macs with System 6.0 or greater; 32-bit Quick Draw and a 256-colour display. It will also be available for CD ROM PCs that have a Sound Blaster or Pro Audio Spectrum card, and a CD ROM with MPC drivers. A CDTV version is also close to a finish. More cases in the series are planned, though these will be self-contained programs rather than add-ons.*



*The press release for Electronic Arts' **Black Crypt** states that 'the adventure begins as you create a party of brave worriers'. (Dave Timoney)*





DAEMONSGATE 1

Brian Walker says it's not a small world

Whoever said 'it's a small world' obviously hadn't encountered role playing games. They started off enormous and just grew from there, culminating, so far, in **Daemonsgate 1** from Gremlin Graphics.

All has been peaceful for decades in Elsopea on the continent of Hestor, but suddenly everything started to go horribly, horribly wrong. The city was attacked by daemonic hordes that appeared out of nowhere. The inhabitants of the city of Tormis are besieged by the heathens, who are just content to sit there and let them stew. The player's task is to gather a band a of mercenaries and find a way out of the besieged city in the hope of finding out what drives the demons, and how they can be destroyed.

In **Daemonsgate**, the player controls eight characters in all, and must use their skills and abilities to overcome the various hazards encountered. The program, however, eschews conventional character generation systems in favour of letting the characters have 'personalities' of their own when they are not controlled by the player. Altogether there thirty-two individuals scattered around the game world that are willing to join in the fun at one stage or another.

The map is about 3000 playing screens in size, on which player characters are represented by icons. Factors such as terrain and weather have been hard-wired into the program so they will affect movement and health.

Town travel is the most complex part of the game. Within the borders of Hestor there are seven different cities with their own individual maps, each of which are divided into five sections. The visual quality of the maps is enhanced by animated features such as torches, fireplaces and water. There is also a 'bridging' facility so that characters can pass realistically beneath objects.

Each town contains about four hundred inhabitants which are controlled on a daily timetable. This has the effect of seeming to make them go about their business in a realistic manner.

Combat in **Daemonsgate** is complex yet simple to use. The player takes the role of commander of the group and issues orders to his men, the computer takes care of how each character interprets these orders. The character's personality is a big factor here: a cowardly or berserk character may completely ignore commands and do something unpredictable. The response of the opposing (computer) commander varies according to the character's intelligence.

No fantasy game is complete without magic, and in **Daemonsgate** it comes in five kinds: hedge wizardry, elementalism, daemonology, spiritualism and magick. Each of these five forms is the province of a single culture which involves different conventions and rituals to achieve the desired effect.

So there it is: **Daemonsgate** – big, bold, and brassy. A big review of this big game will appear in our next big issue. ❑

***Daemonsgate 1** should be published by Gremlin Graphics in the UK on all formats next month.*

Published by
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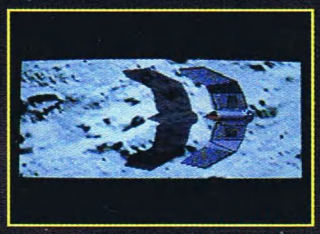

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Reader Service No. 103

V For Victory

Battleset One: Utah Beach

By Peter T Szymonik

I'm a classic grognard. What's a grognard? Loosely translated from French, it means an old battle-hardened foot soldier. In modern-day usage, grognard is also used to describe die-hard board wargamers, the core of the hobby. Grognards can be very hard to please, and they don't like change very much when it comes to their favourite hobby.

Many grognards have been less than thrilled with most computer wargames. Most computer wargames were either designed by software developers with no wargaming experience, or wargamers with no software programming experience. This situation didn't change much until SSI started setting the standard for computer wargames by incorporating many of the same design aspects into its computer wargames that wargame designers did in board wargames.

Still, the computer screen can be very limiting to a wargamer who is used to huge sprawling maps and distinct lines of hundreds if not thousands of wargame counters stretching across the playing area. It can be difficult if not impossible to relate the same information available at a glance on a board wargame map on a 14in computer screen.

Another problem relates to bookkeeping. Computers were originally used in the hobby as game aid programs, or GAPs. These programs kept track of all the busy work. They figured odds, terrain factors, supply considerations, and so on, allowing the players to concentrate on forming strategies.

Too many computer wargames confuse detail and realism with bookkeeping. Rather than allowing a player to concentrate on game play and decision making, computer wargames became glorified spreadsheets in disguise. Winning a battle had little to do with careful planning, it all depended on whether or not you juggled enough numbers which represented tanks between a couple of symbols on the screen.

In an previous review in this magazine, I examined Chris Crawford's **Patton Strikes Back**. This game was a welcome relief and the innovations were outstanding. **Patton Strikes Back** emphasized simplicity and encouraged strategy and game play, letting the computer do all the dirty work, but still lost none of the realism and detail wargamers expect to find in their simulations.

Computer wargames need the innovations found in **PSB** because something has to change if the industry is to attract grognards into its fold. What **PSB** did through innovation, Three-Sixty has done by designing a new computer wargame that looks and feels so much like a real board wargame, it's very hard to tell the difference.

Utah Beach is the first of a series of games Three-Sixty plans to release as part of its **V For Victory** Battleset series. It covers the Normandy landings in 1944. The game is set at operational level and offers six scenarios, ranging from an introductory one-hour scenario all the way to a massive campaign game that can take weeks to finish (Three-Sixty conservatively estimates 60 hours).

The extraordinary attention to detail put into the game is evident the moment the opening screen is presented. This is by far one of the most graphically pleasing and downright beautiful games ever designed for the Mac. The option buttons seem three-dimensional, status buttons look like little red and green LEDs, and the map and unit symbols are almost impossible to tell apart from the finest board wargame designs.

More than most

If **Utah Beach** ended there and offered nothing more than a standard computer wargame under all the outstanding graphics work, it would still be well worth the price, but this game offers so much more.

Units are represented by actual counters, just like board wargames. There is stacking (up to three units in a hex) and any unit in a stack can be selected simply by repeatedly clicking on stack. The entire stack can be given the same orders by shift-clicking the whole stack. For grognards, the game offers a unique option that allows the players to change counter markings from the standard rifleman/tank/artillery symbols to standard NATO symbols used in most board wargames.

This game can be customised to the

Designed by
Ed Rains, Keith Zabalaoui, Larry Merkel

Published by
Three-Sixty Pacific

Systems
Macintosh (Plus or better, II series and 2Mb of free RAM highly recommended). PC version in Super VGA only to follow later this year

Mac graphics
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Supports
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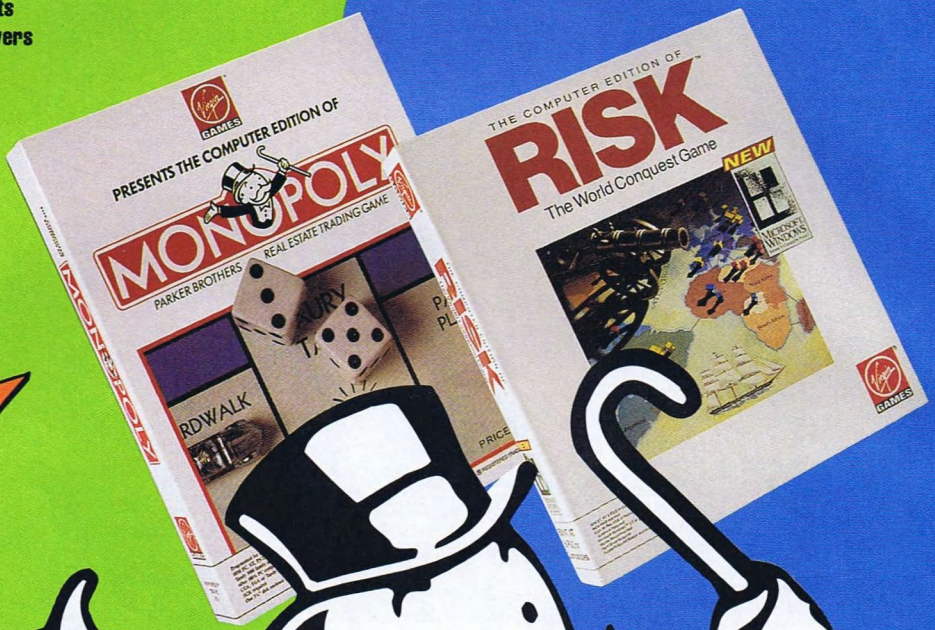

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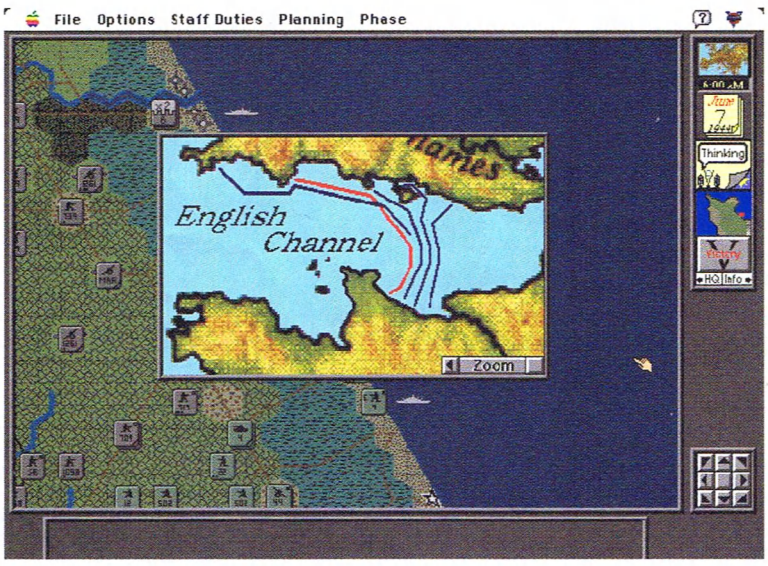
Reader Service No. 98

nth degree. The player can opt to play the Americans, or the Germans, or to switch sides in the middle of the game, or to play the game with another human over a network.

The scenario selection screen is a delight in and of itself. From here the player chooses one of the six scenarios (and is offered a detailed description of the task at hand). Following on from this is a plethora of choices: to use the game's unit symbols or standard NATO symbols; to use historical or random weather conditions; to use air power and naval bombardment, and so on. The player is in complete control of all of these controls, and they can even be changed at any time during the game!



The game is played in a series of phases. The first phase is the planning phase. In this phase the units are given orders and strategic decisions are made. Fire missions, air operations, and naval bombardment are also targeted in this phase.

The interface is entirely integrated into the Mac environment, the mouse is used to select a unit and as movement is plotted, a small arrow shows the unit's movement and/or attack plan. A small window displays attack odds and is updated as new units are ordered into an attack.

Following the above mentioned customizable aspect of this game, any and all aspects of the planning phase can be delegated to the computer. The computer assistant can plot air and naval strikes, coordinate supply, move units, attack and so on, or the player can completely control all of the action.

It's a nice touch for players who want more of a quick game rather than an in-depth simulation.

After carefully planning an attack, the player gets to sit back and watch the action in the execution phase. All hell breaks loose once the plan is set into motion, and everything that can go wrong often does go wrong.

Each game turn represents four hours of real time. As time passes, units move across the map and combat takes place, an American or German flag appears to let the player which side won control of a disputed hex and the map is updated to reflect newly controlled hexes and the presence of new enemy positions (in 'blind' mode.)

Following the execution phase the damage (given and taken) can be examined in the 'after action' phase. A detailed report for each attack is displayed as the player selects the 'flagged' hexes where combat took place. This report lists how well each side fought (light to heavy resistance) and how many casualties were taken on both sides. Some players may wish to skip this phase for more of a 'fog of war' feel, but reading the reports can reveal clues about where the enemy is weakest.

Victory conditions and reinforcements for the game are detailed in a special pop-up window that shows artful calendar as well as a day by day summary of the weather conditions and other useful information. Victory points are gained for controlling terrain and for eliminated enemy units.

The game progresses quite well, and the player can alter the game to suit his tastes – creating either an extremely detailed simulation to match the best board wargames can offer, or more of a player's type game that can be finished in one sitting.

True to form, Three-Sixty offers much more than a computer game in the **VFV** package. Along with the game, there is a terrain chart and a unit symbol chart that could have come from any board wargame, an operations manual that has a great step-by-step tutorial, and a 156-page reference manual that covers everything from the details of the game, to designer's notes, and an incredible 21-page listing of references!

The reference manual is what most wargamers would expect to see in a hefty legalese-type board wargame rule book; what Three-Sixty did was make the whole thing eminently readable and understandable even to non-wargamers. The thin 30-page operations book is all that is really needed to get the game up and running, and the average computer gamer should have no trouble understanding the basics of game, actually playing the introductory scenario in under 10 minutes.

I have only two complaints about the game. The first concerns the amount of memory the game requires. On a Mac running System 7, finding 3Mb of free RAM can be difficult, even with all extensions off. But this is a necessary evil if we want state-of-the-art, and there is no doubt that **V For Victory** has indeed set a new standard for computer wargaming in terms of detail and programming. The quality of the design equals or exceeds what we would expect from an expensive application.

AI level

The second item is a bit more serious: the artificial intelligence in the program could use some work. In a game simulating an American onslaught in the face of stiff German resistance, the defending German units retreat far too often. Too frequently, American units have to be sent racing after a German unit heading in the other direction and the Germans don't seem to put up a real fight until cornered. This is not to say that the Germans never retreated historically, but there was some very heavy combat involved. Fortunately, in most scenarios this quirk is more of an annoyance rather than a fatal flaw, but I would hope that Three Sixty will correct it in a future upgrade. ❑

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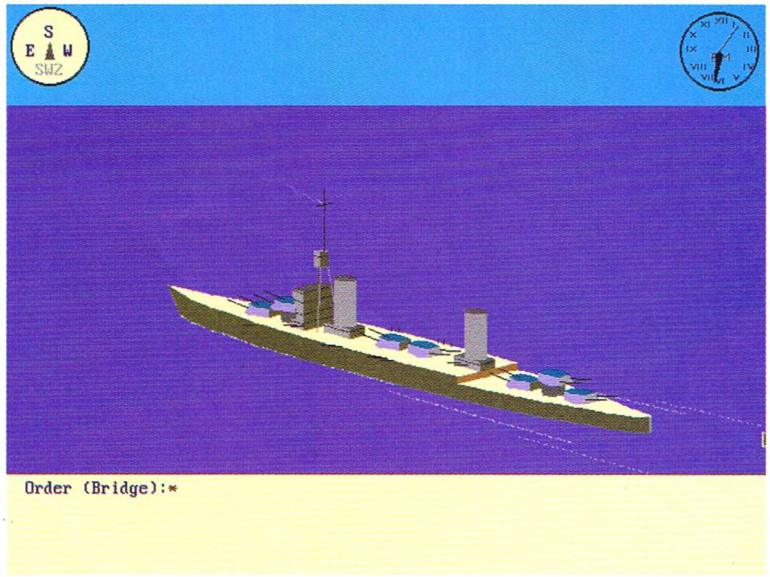
Reader Service No. 75

Dreadnoughts

All at sea

By Sandy Eisen



Designed by
Peter Turcan

Published by
Turcan Simulations

Systems
IBM PC, Amiga, ST, Archimedes

PC graphics
EGA, VGA

Supports
Adlib sound board; keyboard

Players
1-2

Notes
Two scenario disks, Ironclads and Bismark, are currently available. The former will include four scenarios from the Sino-Japanese War of 1894 and Russian-Japanese War of 1904/05. Bismark will come with six scenarios from the Second World War, three of which relate to the pursuit and sinking of the Bismarck.

Dreadnoughts is a computer wargame allowing the recreation of naval battles from the First World War. It has been designed and programmed by Peter Turcan, and follows the tradition of his earlier wargames such as **Borodino**, **Waterloo** and **Armada**.

The program is described as a surface fleet battle simulator that aims to recreate the looks, specifications and tactics of fleets during the great age of the battleship. The basic game includes four historical scenarios; Coronel, Falklands, Dogger Bank and Jutland. Additionally there are two imaginary training scenarios set in the channel, and a hypothetical scenario (Canopus at Coronel).

The structure of the game data files, which can be read and easily understood with a text editor, suggests that additional scenarios should be readily created, and that keen players with a small amount of computer know-how may be able to make modifications or even write their own new scenarios. Please note that this is my own (untested) surmise and is not described in the manual.

Since this game has been published by Dr Turcan's own company, he has sensibly avoided the standard-sized 'air box' so beloved by many software houses. While some do contain sufficient components to warrant the box size, many other larger boxes contain no more than this neat little package (except a foam spacer!) and take up excessive amounts of shelf space as a result.

A 95-page manual clearly explains the game system, and includes a lot of historical material to stimulate interest in the subject of the game. Much of this commentary applies to the scenarios not included in the basic game.

Additionally a large map sheet details the playing area, order of battle and starting positions for all the scenarios. Jutland is on one side, and all the other areas are squeezed onto the other. This is helpful, but does not really compensate for the complete lack of map presentation of data from within the program.

Dreadnoughts has as its objective the presentation of a naval battle from the perspective of the commanding admiral. The game's graphics adequately present a view in the cardinal directions from any ship (not just the flagship), but offers no provision for displaying information on a map. This is the first of the interface's many failings.

The nearest comparison to the game system would be miniatures, and in this sense **Dreadnoughts** represents a transference of naval wars from tabletop to desktop. As in tabletop games, the skill here lies in strategic manoeuvring. The action occurs in a form of real-time: orders are input and will remain in place until countermanded.

Each scenario ends on a given date, and as a ship engages in battle, damage points are accumulated. The winner is determined by points total. In battle, sighting reports of enemy ships and position reports from friendly ones are given in terms of latitude and longitude. I suspect that players are supposed to plot these on the paper maps provided. This is exactly what I expect the computer to do for me. It is very difficult to follow what is happening and plan a sensible strategy simply from the 'sea-views' provided. A real admiral, however, would have a staff updating and presenting charts to him so this is entirely consistent with the theme and scope of the game.

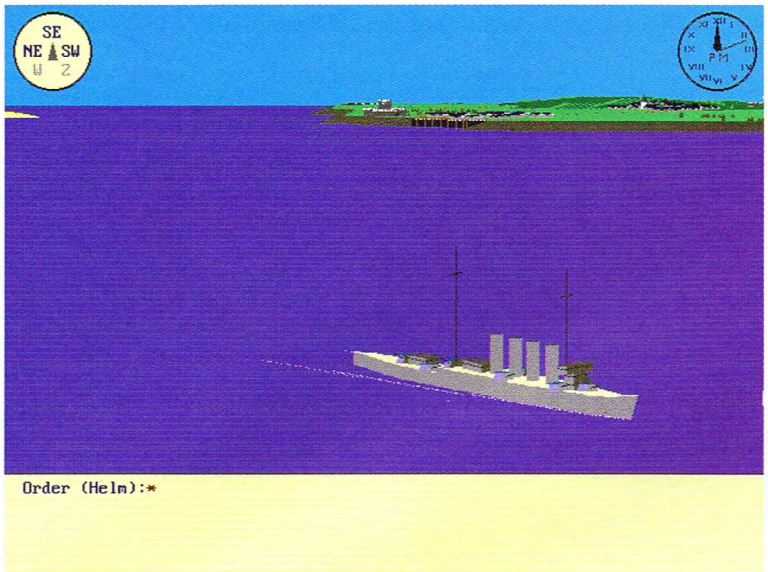
Written orders

Another major failing of the interface is that all orders must be typed in to a parser similar to that used in Dr Turcan's other wargames, and text-only adventure games. The parser is a good one, and a satisfactory and appropriate range of commands are included.

The problem is the tedium of endlessly typing commands such as 'Signal the Tiger to send me your damage report' or 'Signal the Aurora to station your ship 4 miles astern of the Tiger'. No short cuts are available, and each order must be entered in full afresh. One soon longs for a feature such as F3 in DOS to bring up the last command for editing.

What is really needed is an alternative method of entering the same commands quickly via a menuing system, or possibly by command keystrokes.

Despite the problematical interface,



the game has many plus points. The basic idea, concepts and game engine for **Dreadnoughts** are all excellent. Dr Turcan is a skilled programmer and experienced wargamer, but I fear that he may have set his sights just a little too low.

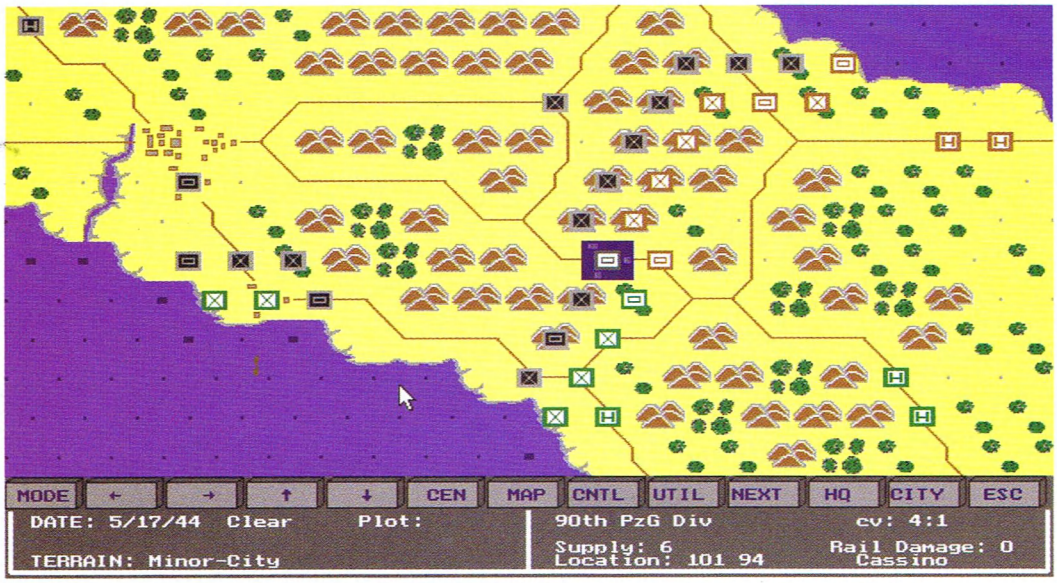
The program as it now stands is an excellent core for further development. The small size of the program and the fact that it seems to be the work of a single enthusiast set it aside from most other games now being published. I suspect that Dr Turcan may be somewhat isolated from the mainstream of games development, and writing for a market which has moved on. This is exemplified by his inclusion of CGA support for a game featuring a 'spectacular 3D perspective view', and also including an extra executable file (DN512.EXE) to run on those machines without a full 640k of RAM. The wargamers I know argue about whether 2Mb or 4Mb (or 8Mb!) is an acceptable minimum configuration.

No sound support is given for the PC speaker and although the game is supposed to support a Soundblaster board, I could not get a peep out of mine.

Despite all the above, **Dreadnoughts** can be strongly recommended to wargamers looking for a sound historical approach to this topic.

With additional work to provide a better command interface and mapping support, a sequel could become the '**Harpoon**' standard for First World War era naval combat.

As published now, **Dreadnoughts** will be played and enjoyed by those already interested in the subject, but I doubt that it will win many new converts. ❑



THE THINK TANK

David Bolton on strategy in SSI's Western Front

Never in the field of human conflict has so much been so crammed into so little space as the **Western Front** rule book. SSI's huge game of the Normandy invasion could do with about twice the number of pages satisfactorily to explain things. This article aims to put wrong to right and generally clean up the mess.

There are four scenarios to choose from: Overlord which starts in May 1944 and lasts until the end of the war and three smaller scenarios.

The smaller scenarios are Diadem, the Italian campaign fought at the same time as Overlord; Cobra, the breakout after the landing; and Bulge, the German counterattack through the Ardennes.

Although one can play the defender (Germans in all but Bulge), the computer seems to play best when defending, so strategies and tactics are considered here with the player as attacker.

Understanding the organization of units is essential to game play. HQ units are the most important as they provide reinforcements and can move a complete army in one unit (800+ points!) or refurbish battle weary units.

If a unit is really depleted, transferring it back into the HQ unit will speed up its replacements. Units can be split down to brigade level though I find division level less cumbersome. A typical division is 15–20 points strong, but can be higher.

The first few turns of Overlord are slow on the English front while waiting for the right time to strike. Shipping capacity is gained each turn and is scheduled to make 6 June about the earliest to launch a proper invasion. The typical British weather plays a part and bad weather can really delay the show.

Italian job

The Italian campaign is a good diversion during this time and it is always possible to pick another landing site. If this is deemed necessary then do it as early as possible in the game because half the accumulated preparation points are lost each time it is moved.

At the start, with 15 000 points, changing the invasion site loses three turns of good weather, or six turns of bad. Aircraft are quite effective in softening the Germans up and sometimes can wipe out more than 100 tanks in one attack. There are restrictions, however, on using some American units – these cost political points, a mechanism that serves to deter all but the most urgent attacks.

Political points are also spent changing leaders. The manual lists all leaders in the game and it is quite surprising to find a certain Montgomery rated at 4, just ahead of Clark and Ritchie at 3, and Himmler and Hitler at 1. Most other allied leaders are rated in the range 5–8. A touch of bias perhaps?

The Italian front scenario is either played as the Diadem scenario or as part of Overlord. The Allies start holding a front south of Rome, plus a small static invasion force at Anzio. This is a bit of a slog, but the Germans aren't very strong in their defence line. By June or July the front line should have collapsed and Rome will be home.

Retreat and reform

Milan is of strategic importance. Capture Milan and it leaves just two other Axis supply centres. The German computer player continually falls back and reforms a few hexes north

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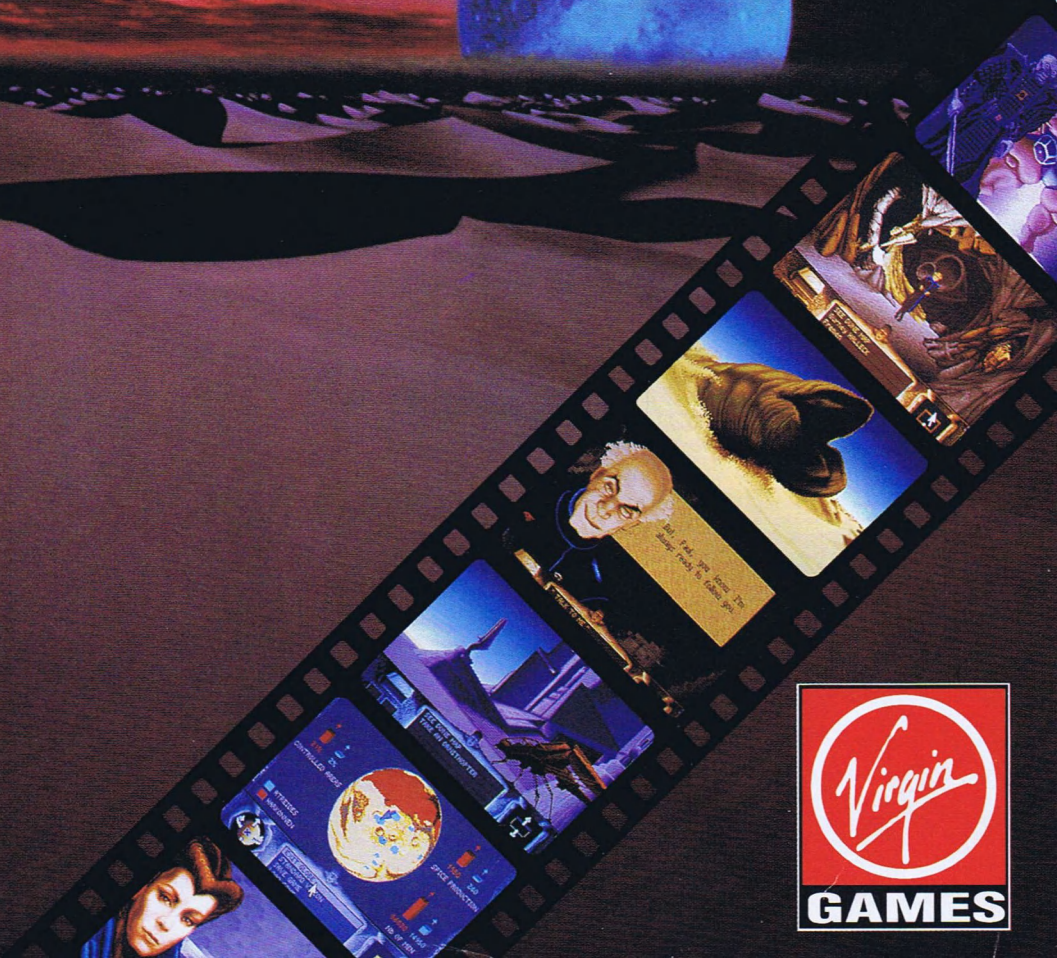

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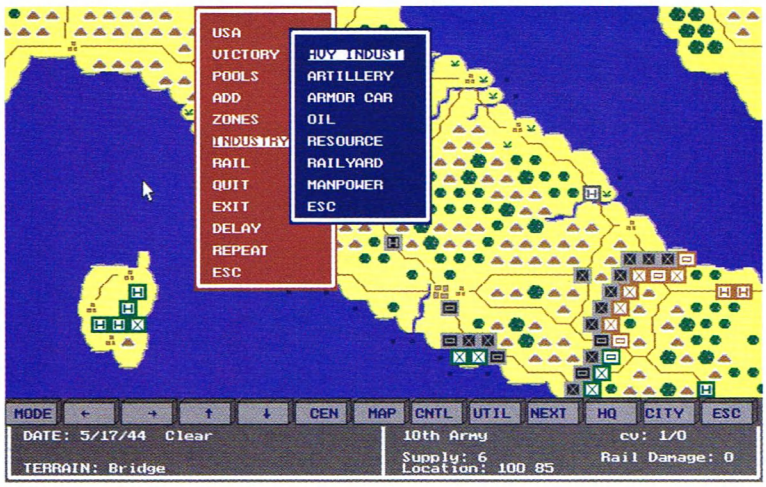


after each defence line is no longer sustainable. The road from Livorno to Rimini (at the neck of Italy) seems to be the stand and fight line. My experiences here suggest that if the Germans form this last line, it won't be broken. Use armour to move fast and try to keep lines from forming – a difficult task.

Amphibious landings can be used to bring land troops further up the coast, but this seems a fundamental flaw – that is, the Normandy landings won't take place. In the Overlord scenario that is OK, but in the Diadem scenario it in effect means getting something for nothing.

When the decision is made to invade, troops can only land in one invasion zone. This is a few hexes either side of the nominated hex. This is a good time to spend a few political points and neutralize nearby units by bombing.

German HQs are inactive until Allies come within 15 hexes, but the response is then fast and effective. The German computer player is very good at building defence lines. It is slow to escape encirclement and this makes it possible to trap a number of divisions. When cut-off, their supply level drops to zero and they crumble at the first attack.

Early invasion

I've tried doing an early invasion by splitting up the 21st into corps, divisions and brigades and shipping across up to the current capacity but this is a risky approach. The German computer player attacks whenever it feels it has a chance and quite often when it doesn't. My first try with this approach resembled Dunkirk.

For those too lazy to bother doing the invasion, the Cobra scenario starts in July 1944 with the Allies landed and ready to breakout. This scenario lasts until November by which time several German and Dutch cities (Essen, Antwerp, Arnhem, Aachen, Cologne, and Metz) must have been captured for victory.

Cobra doesn't include the Italian game. Though lasting longer, this is simpler than Bulge. The encirclement tactic is very useful in Normandy and shortens the war if used successfully. Playing Bulge as the Germans is hard. The British/Canadians in the north are just too strong to take on without a lot of casualties.

The centre and lower part are where the Americans are weakest and this is the line to attack along. The main tactic here is keep advancing.

Go only for those cities which are needed (Bastogne, Antwerp, Namur, Liege, St Vith and Luxemburg) and ignore others. At least one city by the start of 1945 (turn 4 or 5) must be captured or else for you the war is over, Fritz.

The rail network is managed automatically as far as maintenance goes. Bombing disrupts it, but it automatically repairs itself each turn. Units can be moved rapidly but lose more readiness the further they move.

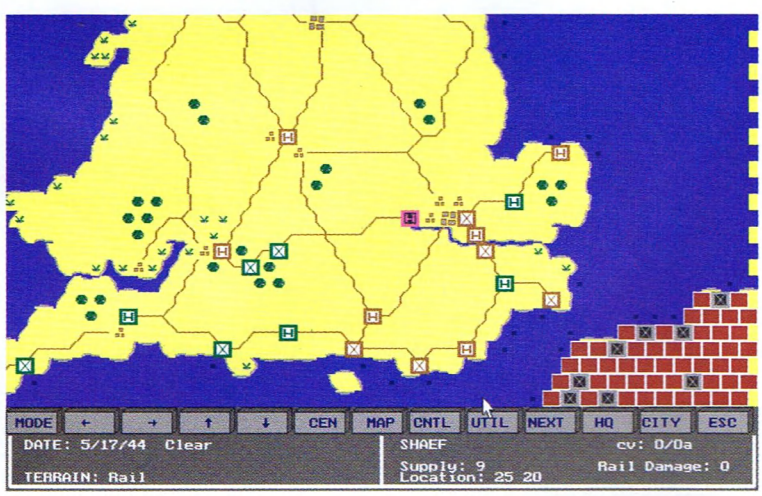
The plot order is used for combat movement next to enemy units. Mechanised units move five hexes, others move two. What is not revealed in the rulebook is that there is no stacking. Units halt if trying to move through each other (a major problem in The Ardennes) and this can totally ruin an attack. **WF** does not show unit movement – all it shows are the final locations of units, so it's up to the player to work out what moved where.

When giving orders, ordered units are displayed in a different colour. Combat can be synchronised between units to get the best odds using artillery bombardment, overrun and static attack (static attack is where the attacker does not occupy the defender's turf).

Out of supply

Supply is the key to defeating units while keeping casualties low. Pierce the defences, cut off supply and the target unit's supply level (SL) will drop to 0. Any successful attack will then force it to surrender if the retreat hex is also SL 0. I used this tactic to wipe out an entire German army in Cobra.

Good luck – even the best generals need it. ❑



Published by
SSI (US), US Gold (UK)

Systems
IBM PC

Notes
Reviewed in issue 13

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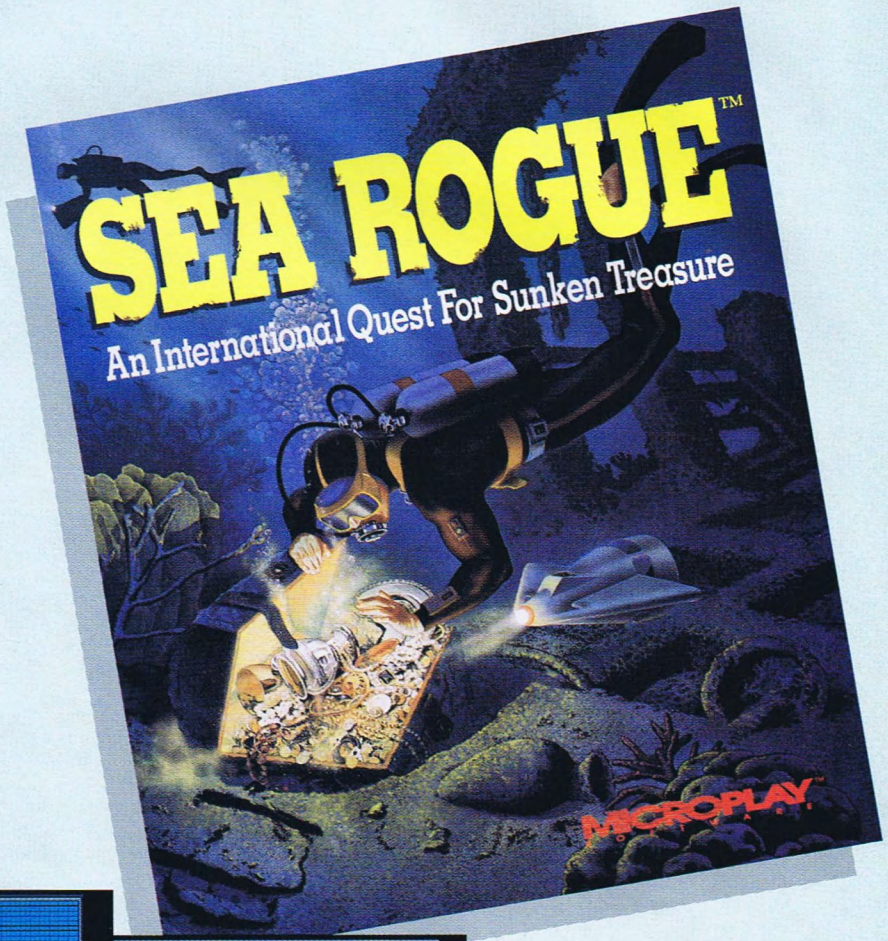

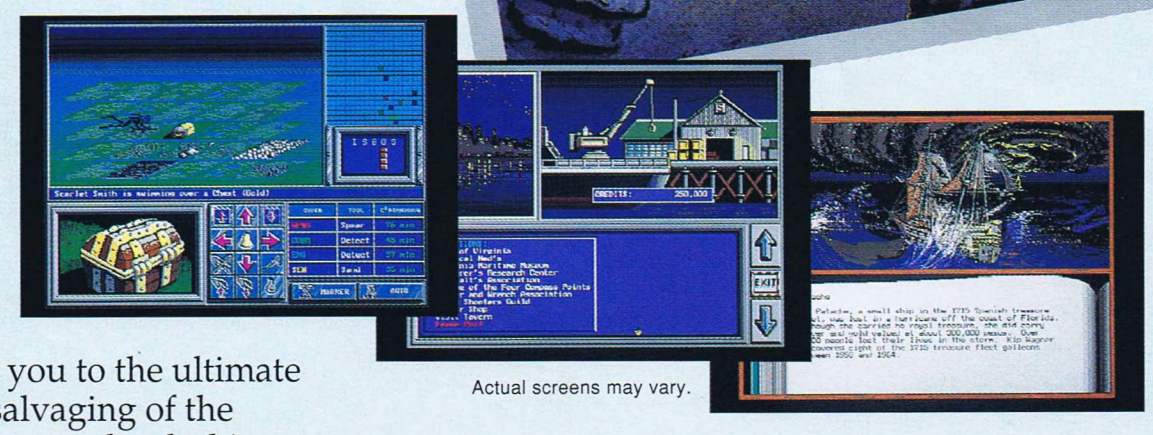

Actual screens may vary.

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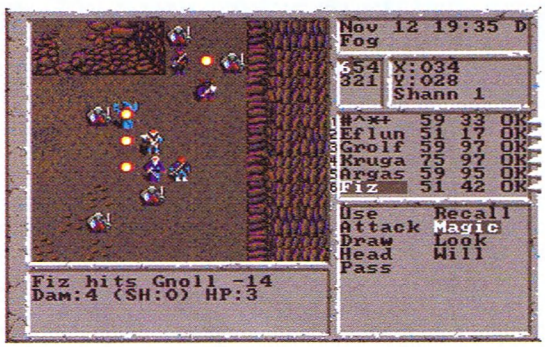
DEMO DIRECTORY



On offer this month: Magic Candle 2, The Four and Forty (left)

Welcome to the Demo Directory. Each month we will present a list of current demos available for just the price of a postage stamp, or, in the case of bulletin boards, a phone call.

To obtain these treasures, just send a stamped addressed envelope (A5 minimum) marked '*Strategy Plus* Demo Offer' to the appropriate software house. Please add a 34p stamp for each disk to cover postage costs. Allow 14 days for delivery as some of these disks will be duplicated to order. In the event of non-delivery please address queries to the software house concerned.

Lots of new goodies this month from Empire Strategy whose boss, Ian Higgins, has promised to buy me a pizza if I say that **Campaign** is 'a blown simulation of the D Day landings during World War II'. That's be a deep pan American Hot please, Ian. Empire has also got its **Pacific Islands** demo available for the PC now. Impression's new strategy games **Air Bucks** and **Samurai: Way of the Warrior** form part of its new slide show on disk. Other titles will also be featured, though exactly which are not know at press time.

If you haven't done so already, then don't miss ordering the **Magic Candle II** and **Darklands** demo from Electronic Arts and Microprose respectively.

Bulletin Boards

Virgin Games

Tel 081 964 4033, comm parameters 8-N-1. All speeds up to 34 400 baud supported.
Over 13 000 files on-line including demos of the latest games such as Dune (PC) and Floor 13 (PC). In addition there are playing tips for all the Infocom games in ASCII format.

Sierra On-Line

Tel 0734 304227, comm parameters 8-N-1. Baud rates: 300, 1200, 2400.
Over 25 000 files on-line including upgrades, patches, special music drivers, and demos of most of their games including sneak previews of upcoming releases. There is also an electronic mail system where users may leave requests for hints.

Empire Strategy

4–6 The Stannetts, Laindon N Trade Centre, Basildon, Essex, SS15 6DJ.
Pacific Islands: Team Yankee 2 (PC). Available on 5.25in (high density) and 3.5in (low density). **Campaign** - a full blown, etc (ST and Amiga). **Wrath of the Demon** (PC, Amiga); **Space Ace** (Amiga, ST); **Dragon's Lair** (Amiga, ST, PC); **Dragon's Lair II** (Amiga, ST, PC); **Team Yankee 2: The Pacific Islands** (Amiga, ST); **International Sports Challenge** (Amiga, ST); **Guy Spy** (Amiga); **Twilight 2000** (PC); **Megatraveller 2** (PC). Note: all PC demos are available on both disk sizes.

Electronic Arts

Langley Business Centre, Langley, Nr Slough, Bucks.
Magic Candle II: the Four and Forty; fully playable demo (PC, 3.5in high density disk drive required).

Microprose

Unit 1 Hampton Rd Industrial Estate, Tetbury, Glos GL8 8LD.
Civilization (PC) interactive tutorial; **Darklands** rolling demo. 3.5in high density disk drive required for both these demos.

Impressions

Unit 2/12 Chelsea Garden Market, Chelsea Harbour, Lots Rd, London SW10 0XL.
Slide shows of several Impressions games available for the ST, Amiga, and PC.

Magic Candle 2: fully playable demo

Omar Sharif on Bridge

The trumps go west

By Jon Gilbert

'Welcome to Omar Sharif on Bridge,' purrs the eponymous old smoothie on start-up. In addition to the standard mug shot on the box, his recognisable voice (courtesy of a sound card) makes comments as well.

Unfortunately this feature is largely a gimmick. An aural reminder of the contract and declarer is useful, but the observations following each trick become annoying after about a minute and a half. Comments such as 'That was good play' or 'Bad luck, try again', reiterated after winning or losing each trick, are often inaccurate and misleading. Fortunately they can be turned off while keeping the rest of the speech.

The interface is the standard windows, mouse and pull down menus type, which works well enough. The graphics are passable but frankly a little dull – I was reminded of the original GEM interface on an Atari ST. The overall impression is one of worthiness but lacking the polish expected of a PC game in 1992.

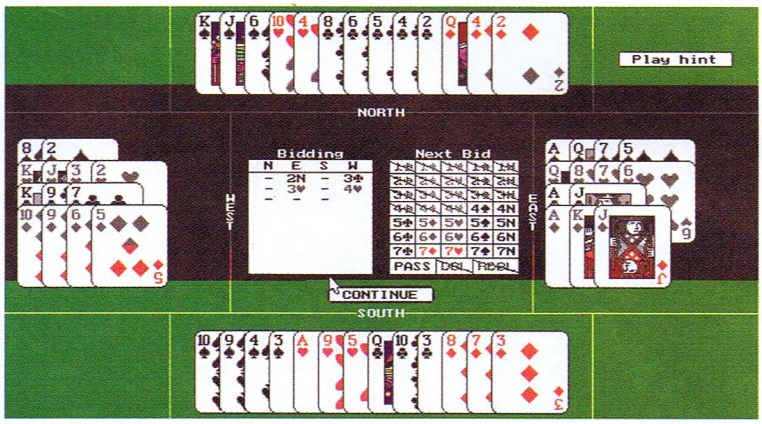
Hands can be generated randomly, entered manually or loaded from disk. The player can choose to play and see any or all of the hands dealt, defaulting to South only, with the program playing the other positions.

Bidding is handled neatly using a grid of possible bids (1 club up to 7 no trumps, pass, double and redouble), with bids crossed off as they become invalid. Hints are available if required, with the program giving its suggestion of what would be a good bid.

The bidding system appears to be standard Acol, although no mention of this is made in the otherwise adequate manual. Stayman and Blackwood conventions are supported, but the player is forced to play a strong no trump as the program lacks any ability to customise the bidding system.

Once a contract is reached, the player as dummy can decide to play declarer's hand rather than sit and watch the computer play all three hands. If defending, the player can choose to play the declarer's hand instead. The program appears to play a fairly good game most of the time, drawing trumps or cross-ruffing when appropriate. However it does make the occasional gaffe, such as West leading the king of trumps into declarer South's ace and queen.

Overall the program does not seem able to fall back on a secondary strategy should the obvious one fail, especially if the opposition's suits break badly.



There are several useful features available during play. Remaining tricks can be claimed if they are certain, or conceded if the situation is hopeless. The program will also claim the remaining tricks on occasion, but beware attempts to claim unwinnable tricks! Cards can be taken back (up to the first card played) to review the play so far, try an alternative line of play, or just plain cheat. It is not possible to re-bid a hand, however, once the playing of it has started. A hint is also available if the player is undecided on any particular trick.

Scoring is calculated automatically after each hand is completed. This is done as in standard rubber bridge, so rubbers, games or just single hands can be played and scored. The scoring can be explained on request if the player is unfamiliar with what goes above and below the line.

The tutorial hands supplied with the game claim to present the novice bridge player with an easy-to-use learning guide to the world of contract bridge. However, I encountered several problems with the tutorial system.

First, one of the voice files was missing on my copy, so that speech gets switched off. Second, I could only successfully load tutorial hands from within a randomly generated hand, not from within a manually entered hand – this seemed to be a bug. Third, the tutorial hands themselves left a lot to be desired.

The way the tutorial works reminded me of the old Autobridge system, with the player asked to select the correct bid or card at each point, allowing three attempts before the computer selects the 'correct' play along with its (sometimes dubious) reasons. In many of the hands the 'correct' strategy relied on a perfect distribution of the cards, and in one hand the recommended play at one point is to play for the drop instead of the more likely finesse. Sure enough the singleton king of trumps obligingly falls to the ace.

The tutorial system itself worked well enough, but perhaps Mr Sharif himself could have helped a bit in devising the hands. It would also be nice if the player could input their own tutorial hands.

Omar Sharif on Bridge is a promising program let down by the ordinary graphics and inflexible approach. It would certainly help a beginner grasp the basics of contract bridge, but experienced players would find the program a less than perfect partner. ❑

Designed by
Oxford Softworks

Published by
Interplay (US), Oxford Softworks (UK)

Systems
IBM PC

PC graphics
VGA

Supports
Mouse; most major sound boards

The Pacific Islands

Team Yankee II

By John Scott

Quite some time ago I was given a tank combat sim to review. It was called **Team Yankee**, and I looked at it, read the blurb, and sighed. 'Why me?' I wondered.

As it happens, the resulting review was so enthusiastic that a few quotes from this humble reviewer actually appeared in subsequent ads for the game. I wasn't interested in tanks, or in a tank platoon battle game, or in the Harold Coyle novel that sparked the whole thing off, but in retrospect, I still think that **Team Yankee** was one of the best games I've yet been given to review.

Clear sighted

Evidently recognizing my perspicacity, the Yankee team contacted me some time ago, sending me a preliminary version of their follow-up game, set in the Pacific Islands. Had I any comments or suggestions? Unfortunately, the disk arrived at a time when personal circumstances made it impossible for me to give it more than a cursory glance – sorry about that, guys. Anyway, I'm always a bit dubious about sequels.

Then, a week or so ago, I arrived home to find a copy of **Pacific Islands** waiting on the doorstep. I opened it, read the manual, but delayed booting the disk for a day or so, almost as if afraid to discover that it couldn't recreate the old **Team Yankee** thrill. When I did load it, I discovered a rather nice animated intro, accompanied by some truly dreadful reggae-style music (which I'm assured will be changed by the time you read this).

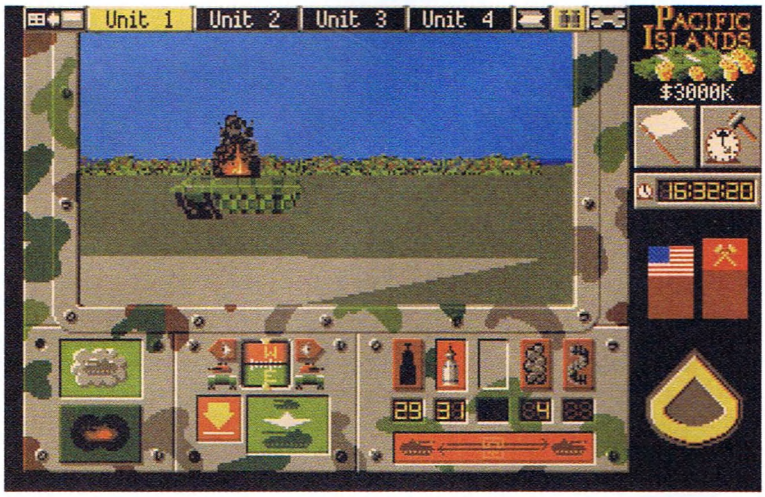
In **Pacific Islands**, the aim is to recapture each of the five islands of the Yama Yama Atoll from the nasty Commies. The player takes command of four tank units and leads them into battle using a really neat control system and screen display which allows the screen to be split into four sections and gives almost simultaneous control of each unit.

For a more detailed look, any of these four 'little screens' can be blown up to full screen size, and for each unit the options are a normal 'out the window' view, a thermal image, a map of the area (it's possible to get zoom views of all of these), or a chart showing the status of the individual vehicles which make up the unit.

Head start

But I'm getting a bit ahead of myself here. Before even thinking of going into battle, the wise commander will take advantage of the training course provided. This is, in effect, a walk-through to enable players to get to grips with the various controls involved in the game.

In the training section the units are driven around a course, leaving one unit at each of four stop signs. In the process, the player is treated to a pa-



Designed by
Steven W Green, Kevin R Ayre, Richard L Yapp, David L Pringle

Published by
Empire Strategy/ Readysoft

Systems
IBM PC, Amiga, ST

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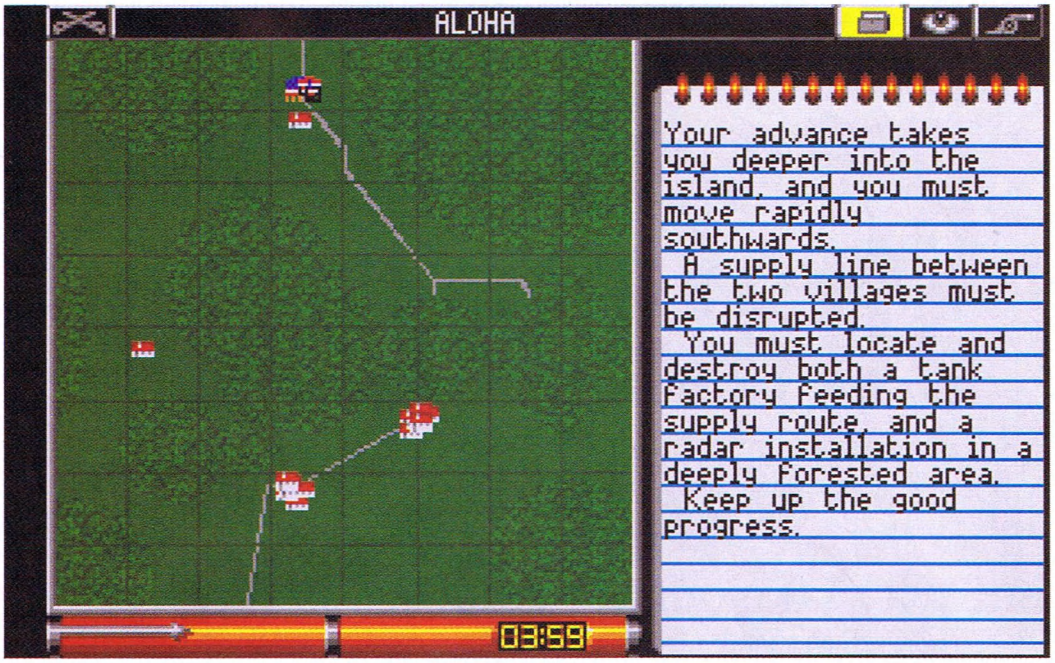

ALOHA
Your advance takes you deeper into the island, and you must move rapidly southwards.
A supply line between the two villages must be disrupted.
You must locate and destroy both a tank factory feeding the supply route, and a radar installation in a deeply forested area.
Keep up the good progress.
03:59

rade of various types of vehicles, has the opportunity to blow up several targets (while avoiding hitting friendly troops), and finally has a taste of frantic whizzing from screen to screen as all four 'parked' units simultaneously encounter fast moving enemies. As if that wasn't enough, there's a time limit on the exercise.

The training course is a thoughtful touch – once or twice round this, and even the greenest player will be able to find his way around all those icons and buttons.

When the first fight begins on the Island of Aloha there isn't a lot of choice where to begin the fight, but once the first few of the 30 scenarios are won, the choice of where to fight next is largely in the player's hands. This makes the game feel less linear than its predecessor, and also calls for a careful overall plan. The events of one scenario can have quite an effect on later battles, especially if care is not taken to wipe out enemy communications networks!

Damage limitation

Damage taken in one battle will not fix itself – it has to be paid for in hard cash. This is another nice touch, for so long as the player is careful to keep within his budget, he can have complete control over the tanks and armaments which make up each unit. More cash is awarded later for each success, but **Pacific Islands** really is a battle of attrition. When funds are low it's possible to purchase damaged, but unreliable craft.

Before going in with the troops, it's a good idea to arrange for artillery support and smoke screens. Another option allows the player to lay minefields (don't forget where they are!). This is all done at the mission briefing stage prior to each scenario.

Main objectives

This briefing outlines the main mission objectives and possible dangers, though some briefings seem to be more accurate than others. It's a touch disconcerting to be told that have the element of surprise is one's side, then find an ambush awaiting. The computer opponents in this game are fiendishly clever, nipping in and out of cover and generally setting a reasonably good example of how the game ought to be played.

Graphically this game is faster and much more varied than **Team Yankee**. Not only tanks, but also all sorts of other things can be blown up, though shooting up the scenery is a bad idea. Quick, clean successes are rewarded, but there are severe penalties for damaging non-military targets, and for taking to long to secure the area.

Out of control

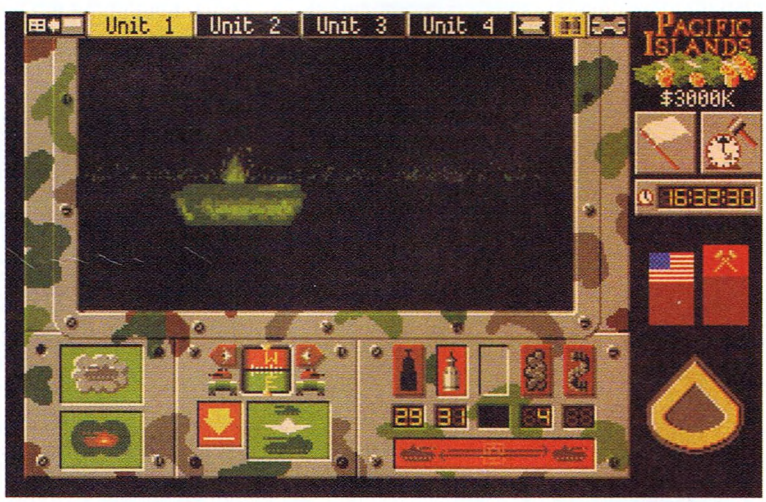
The game has so many controls available that it would be tedious to list them here, and it's unnecessary too, because they are really very easy to learn.

Of course, driving a tank is not simple, let alone controlling four platoons, but the game designers take care to point out that gameplay was foremost in their minds: in matters of game play verses realism, game play won every time.

The designers claim that they took note of criticisms in reviews of the first game and the comments of those who wrote to them about it, and I believe it. I find it hard to find any fault with this game.

I could say that some scenarios were a touch on the slow side to play, but that's solely because of the clever tactics of the computer opponents. Occasionally it was a bit tedious when my main objectives had been achieved, but the battle dragged on and on because I couldn't flush the bad guys out of the forests. But I guess that makes more sense than if they just sat there waiting to be shot!

Team Yankee 2 is more of the same in the best sense of the term, but I for one still couldn't get enough. ❑



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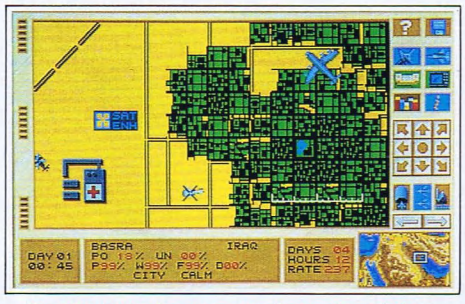
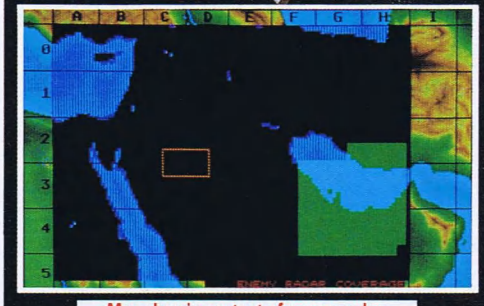
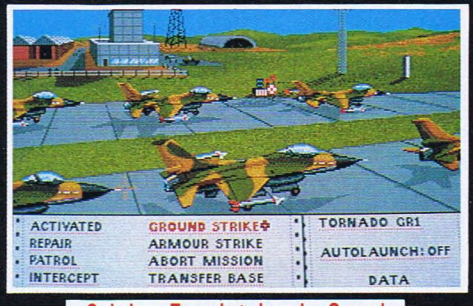


Use advanced radar systems to plan combat missions



Map showing extent of enemy radar coverage



Ordering a Tornado to launch a Ground Attack mission is as easy as point and click!

Impressions

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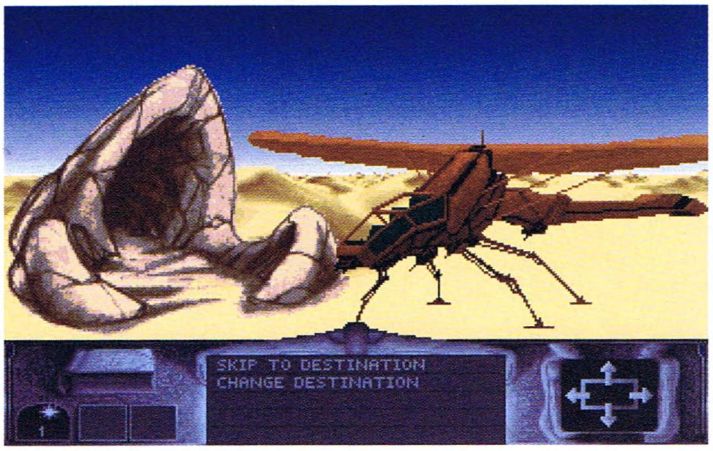
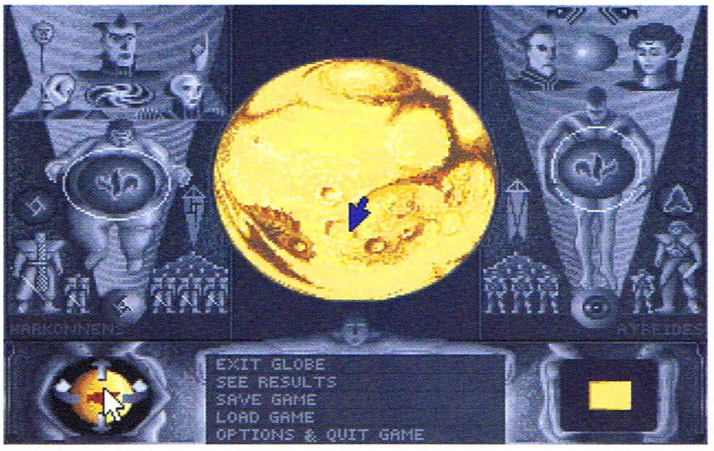




Dune

The spice of life

By Theo Clarke

Designed by
Cryo Interactive Systems

Published by
Virgin

Systems
IBM PC

PC graphics
VGA

Supports
Adlib, Adlib Gold, Roland, Sound Blaster, Thunderboard sound boards

Frank Herbert's science fiction novel *Dune* is a genre classic. His masterpiece of creative imagination is a planetary culture that is both alien and common to us.

Dune – the very name conjures up desolation. Desert sandscapes cover most of the planet's surfaces, broken only by great rock ridges. Giant worms, hundreds of yards long, live beneath the sand and attack any who linger on it. Human life exists in a few scattered places where precious water is available, but even those settlements are buffeted by terrible storms.

But the planet is crucial to the destiny of a galactic empire. Only on Dune can spice be harvested. Spice is the key to interstellar travel. Only by ingesting the addictive drug can the Guild Steersmen continue to experience visions of the future, enabling them to plot a safe path through hyperspace. Spice is also a geriatric medicine that prolongs life. Without a stable supply of spice throughout the galaxy the Emperor cannot avoid civil revolt. With spice, one can buy whatever one wants.

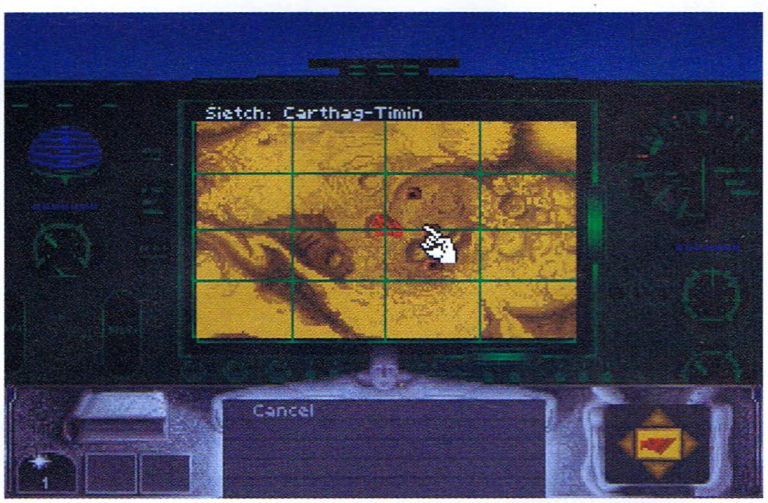
Powerful forces struggle for control of Dune. The Emperor, the nomadic native Fremen and aristocratic families like the Atreides and the Harkonnen all vie for power. All need spice. Some will harvest it directly when it blows in an isolated area of sand, risking the onslaught of worm and storm alike. Others will take it violently in battle or quietly in taxes.

This is the stuff of legend. The book spawned sequels, boardgames, and a sprawling movie that was cut to incoherence. The film had its own licensed products, from stickers to sweatshirts. Now, years later, we have the computer game.

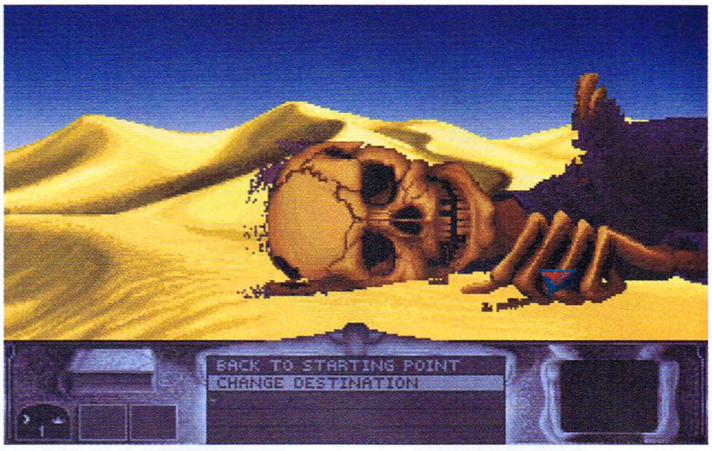
The hero of the book is Paul Atreides and he is the focus of this game. The object of the game is for Paul to control the entire planet. To do this he must recruit Fremen and set them to harvesting spice, fighting the Harkonnen and creating fertile irrigated areas. The disposition of the Fremen demands a series of strategic decisions, but the game has a linear plot loosely derived from the books. The result is a curiously compelling mixture of adventure and strategic management, and the graphics emphasise this miscegenated origin.

Movement and strategic planning are implemented on two maps of the planet's surface. There is a small map showing one quarter of the surface in a single screen and indicating the density of spice or the activity of the Fremen in each area. The other map is at almost ten times the size and shows details of the resources available at each site. These maps are typical of those found in strategic combat simulations or in role-playing games like **Ultima**.

Local activities and conversations



I'm your mother, Jessica. The Duke has sent Gurney Halleck to Carthag-Tuek. Go outside, take an orni and fly there. Hurry up, my son, I feel danger...
" TALK TO ME "
" COME WITH ME "
STOP TALKING



with characters take place in animated sequences familiar to sophisticated adventure gamers. Entering a location brings up a picture of the scene with the appropriate characters in place.

The player interface involves no keyboard activity. Everything is controlled by mouse pointing and clicking on simple menus. To move a group of Fremen just click on the group, on the orders menu, and then on the map. To initiate conversation click on the person and on the orders menu. The appropriate menu pops up according to the selected entity.

Conversations are pretty one-sided, however. 'Talk to me,' says Paul. And they do. Often they just remind the lad of things that he is supposed to be doing to help the story along. These reminders are essential. The game does progress if the appropriate actions are not taken, so the reminders can grow quite frantic.

The story is not particularly close to that of the books. In the book the Paul's father, Duke Leto, is killed during a treacherous attack on their stronghold. Paul and his mother, Lady Jessica, escape into the desert in an ornithopter, a bird-like flying machine. They survive a sand storm and a sand worm before falling into the hands of the Fremen. Paul persuades the Fremen to protect them. He begins to have visions and leads a Fremen jihad against the Harkonnens. In the game, Paul's father dies attacking the Harkonnen and Paul keeps the stronghold as his base. Paul's development in the game is much steadier, while the planet is far more homogeneous than Herbert's.

Sound and vision

The game looks beautiful, it sounds good and the interface is completely intuitive. The preview copy had no manual and there is no on-line help, but I had no need of such aids. Clearly this quality is there by design.

Small touches show the depth of consideration applied to the game. When Paul is in an ornithopter flying to some new location the menu offers the option to skip directly to the destination. This runs the risk of not spotting some previously unknown location while flying over it, but it eliminates the boring wait that is a feature of so many games with impressive animated sequences.

The only really slow sequence is the dispatch of spice to the Emperor, which requires several mouse clicks before the Emperor's final acknowledgement has been read and the player can move on. Presentation and interface quality are not enough to make a game, of course. There is the game play to consider.

It must be said that **Dune** did not sound like an appealing package. I expected the story to interfere with the strategy and *vice versa*. I was right. The need to step through strategically pointless sequences, like spending a night in the desert to absorb the spice or returning home to hear of the death of Paul's father, can be irritating second time around. Fortunately some repetition can be avoided by using the facility to save two positions. The game also stores the last entry to a location, and the last entry to a new location automatically.

Come judgment day, there are two kinds of games players who are particularly hard to please. One is the customer who has bought an expensive game and is looking for value for money. The other is the experienced reviewer.

Reviewers see hundreds of games every year. They rarely exhaust any game because more are constantly flooding in. They experience everything twice; once to play it, once to write about it. They deeply resent games that waste their time. I played **Dune** through the night. The last game to catch me like this was **Lemmings**. I enjoyed the story, the sounds, the pictures and the challenge. Oh yes, and I loathed the book. ❑

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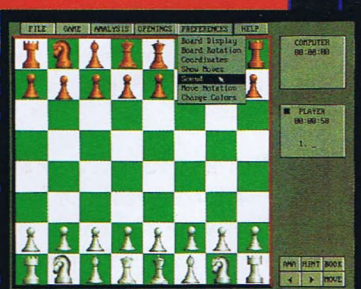

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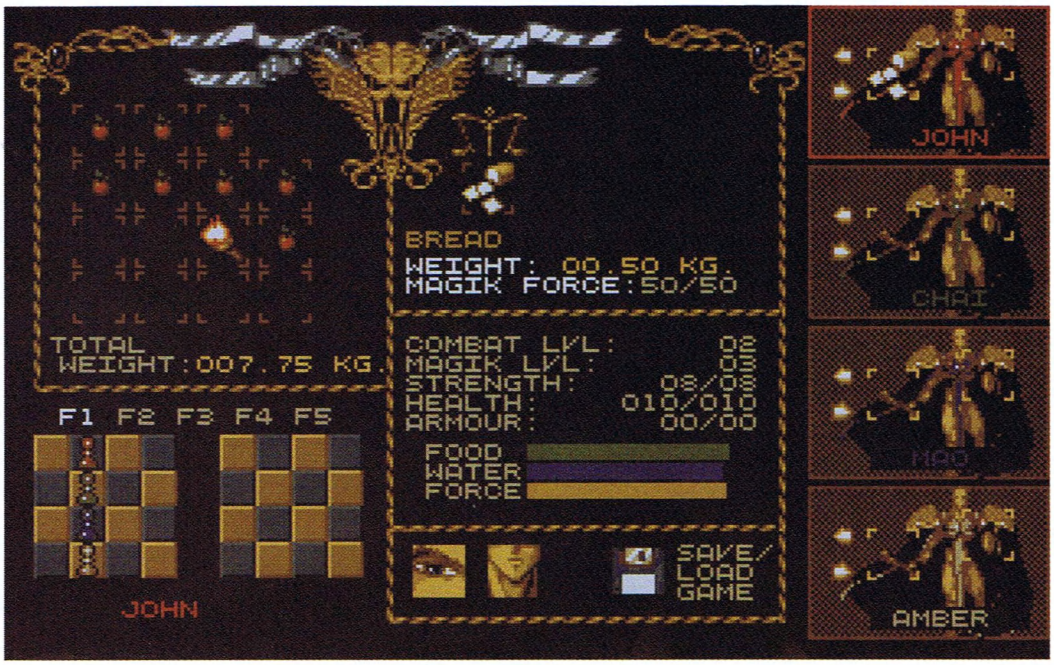


Shadowlands

The light fantastic

By John Scott

Designed by
Barry Costas, Mark Anthony, Dean Lester

Published by
Domark

Produced by
Gremlin Graphics

Systems
IBM PC, Amiga, ST

PC graphics
256-colour VGA

Initially I had my doubts about this program. Then, after playing it for a little while, I loved it. After playing it for a bit longer, I'm back to where I started.

Let me explain. The manual begins with yet another of those 'I work in software but actually I want to be a fantasy writer' efforts. This short story is of the usual standard, if a little more sick than usual and, as is so often the case, adds absolutely nothing to the story that couldn't be summed up in a single sentence.

High spirits

To save you the effort of reading it, here it is, in a single sentence. The good guy has been treacherously slain, but discovers that his spirit can control the minds of his former subjects, so instead of doing the decent thing and heading off to Nirvana, Valhalla, or wherever, he decides to lead four of them back into the Shadowlands in search of vengeance and a shot at reincarnation. Fair enough, I suppose – it's a romp through the dungeons of the Shadowlands, fighting beasties, solving puzzles, and trying not to starve to death on the way.

This is why my initial reaction was less than enthusiastic. But I perked up a bit when I loaded the game, as it seemed that – amazing as it sounds – some original thought had gone into the design.

As usual, first the team of noble adventurers is created. The stats for each character are randomly generated, though it's possible to continually ask for 're-rolls' until one is happy with a character. Then it's possible to name the characters and change their appearances by flicking through a 'photo-fit' series of different hairstyles, eyes, noses and jaws.

The program recommends that the game is saved at this point, and here comes my first grumble. When this program tells you to insert a blank disk to save the game, it means just what it says – a blank unformatted disk. Try to give it a blank formatted disk and it will politely tell you to stop messing about and do as you're told! The reason for the grumble is that I discovered that I didn't have such a thing lying around.

Potter's wheel

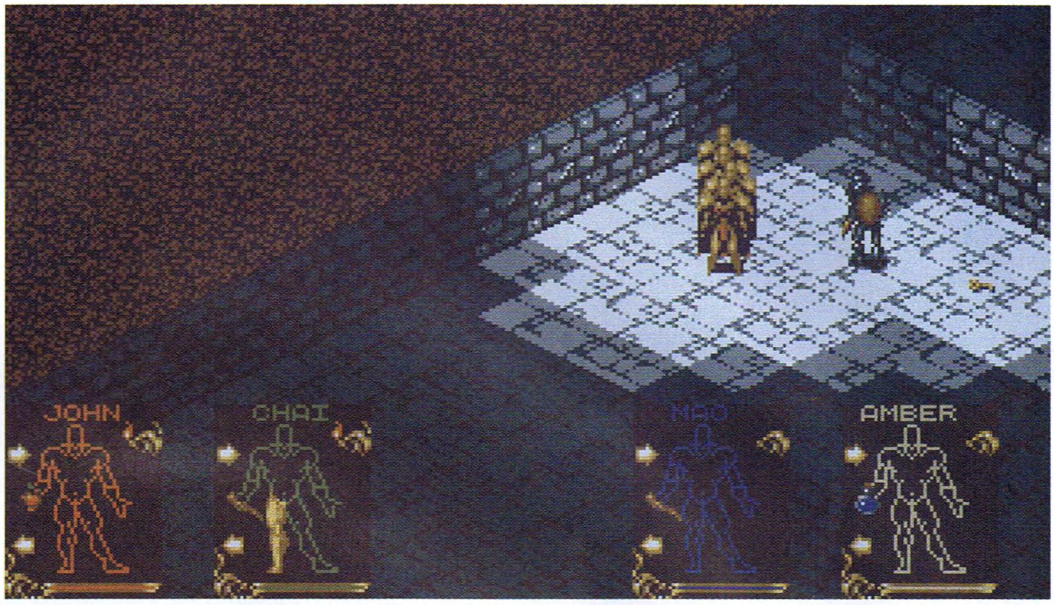
Once into the game, it is simplicity itself to control. I pottered about with it for a while before studying the manual and later found that I'd worked out most of the game controls for myself – it really is that easy. Each member of the group appears in the centre of the screen in isometric projection. As they move around, they can be kept together in one group (following a leader) or can split up and do their own things.

While they move as a group the player can define the marching order and formation (after all, you wouldn't want your wimp of a mage in the front line – or would you?).

There is a control icon for each of the characters, showing the main outline. Clicking on one leg will put the character in solo movement mode. The other will define him as a leader, and the rest of the party will follow him. Click on the screen, and the character or party will walk to that spot. That's the theory, anyway.

Make a stand

In practice the characters show an amazing lack of intelligence. Give one of the guys a direction and he'll gamely set out for the spot. Then he discovers that there's a tree, or a rock, or something else in the way. Does he walk round it? Nope. He just stands there, wondering what to do next. Leading a party through a doorway can result in



appalling confusion as they blunder around aimlessly, getting in each other's way. It happens often enough to be frustrating.

Also, it wouldn't be unreasonable to expect that after clicking anywhere on the rather limited area shown on the screen, to expect the characters to walk there, (provided that nothing was in the way) but no.

The movement click only works quite close to the characters. This means that movement orders have to be continually re-issued, even to move quite a small distance.

On entering the dungeon itself one immediately encounters the novel feature of the game. Torches or light spells cause the adventurers to move around in a pool of bright light, surrounded by an area of half-light, and then the darkness. It actually works very well, and a sense of urgency develops as the light area begins to dwindle as a torch burns lower and no replacement is in sight.

Besides being necessary to see clearly, the presence of light is important throughout the game. Certain devices in the dungeons are activated by light.

Pick up arm

Returning to the control icons, one arm is used to pick up and manipulate objects while the other is mainly used for combat. Objects are usually so very small that it is necessary to move to the inventory screen just to see what it is the party has found.

The most effective form of combat appears to be to tell each character what weapon to use and who to hit, then sit back and watch, the only involvement being to pull someone out if he's taking too much of a beating. Clicking on the head is used for reading and eating.

I must say that I really enjoyed my first few dungeon forays. On the first excursion the party starved to death rapidly.

The second time around I noticed that the game begins beside an orchard with lots of apples lying around, together with sticks – which proved useful as weapons.

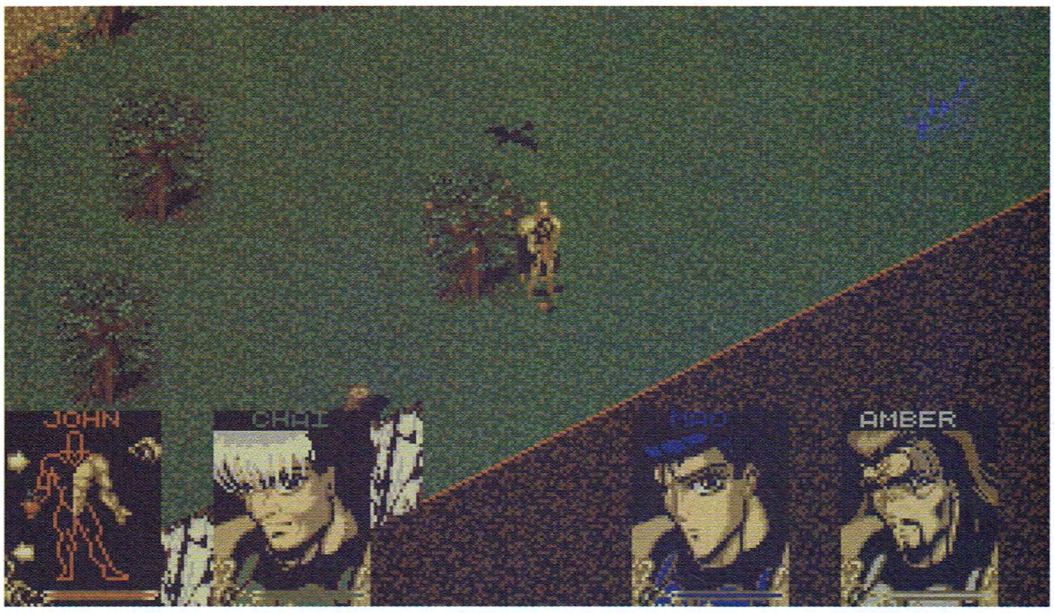
On subsequent playing sessions, I began to feel that game play was really a bit on the slow side. This was partly because of the movement problems, but it's more than that. I found that I never felt really involved – it was like watching it all happen to someone else. The result was a major loss of excitement and tension. Perhaps the isometric format had something to do with this.

Other games (such as **Heimdall**) have also used isometric perspective, but switched to first person graphics for combat. I think that this would have helped **Shadowlands** enormously. In this game, combat more or less consists of saying 'OK lads, hit him!', and watching as the fight takes place.

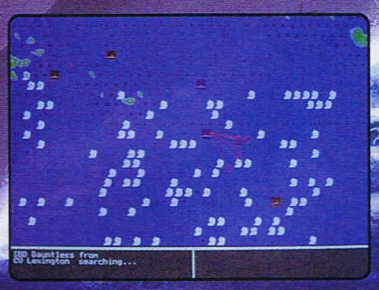
Gains and losses

Shadowlands is a game which quickly gained my enthusiasm, then lost it again. It's a pity, and I can't help but feel that my criticisms, taken individually, are rather minor and almost petty.

Taken collectively, they spell the difference between a game which could have been a classic and one which is merely quite good.



WAR TORN



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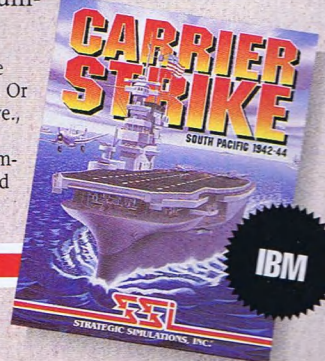

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ROAMING IN THE GLOAMING

Owing to a few serious bugs in the first version of **Twilight 2000**, the first tip for the player who really wants to finish the game is to obtain an upgrade for the program if he encounters a problem.

After getting a working copy of the game and wading through the manual, the player must assemble a platoon of up to 20 recruits. The default characters supplied with the game allowed me to win the war, and unless the player is a die-hard fan of the pen and paper version of this game I would suggest just staying with the platoon that was supplied.

The four characters I used for most missions were Nick, FJ, Paul and Michelle. Three of them were proficient with heavy weapons, and both Nick and FJ were good drivers. Recruits used for other missions were Mark for medical, Quinno for mechanical and Wendy for interrogation. A hand-held radio should always be carried by the leader to call for a needed recruit from headquarters.

Custom built

If the player decides to create custom characters, he should be prepared to spend much time in the character generator. Even if the character gets very good attributes, if he doesn't serve at least three terms in the military he won't gain many combat skills.

After the character is finally trained and has chosen his equipment, his initiative is displayed. If this statistic is less than four he will hardly get a chance to move during combat and all his skills won't be very useful. In the default platoon, Nick, Paul and FJ all have initiatives of five or higher and make very good fighters when equipped with M-60s, M2HBs, or MK-19 grenade launchers.

I admit that I could not discover what factors affect initiative, it seems to be almost random. The player who wishes to create custom characters probably should just roll up four at most, then replace some weaker members of the pregenerated platoon.

During the first eight missions the platoon should gain some good vehicles, and perhaps the best ones for combat are the M2A2 Bradley with its TOW missiles or the T-90 with heavy armour and firepower.

In tank combat, it's probably best to let the computer handle the fight using descriptive mode. The only disadvantage to this is that the computer will sometimes continue attacking one tank and ignore others, although once an enemy has lost its turret it is no longer a threat. After all tanks are disabled, the player should hit them a couple more times each until they stop moving altogether before exiting his vehicle.

A tank that the computer doesn't see as a threat may still tear into the squad with PK fire during the ground combat phase. Save the game again after a successful tank battle before beginning any ground combat.

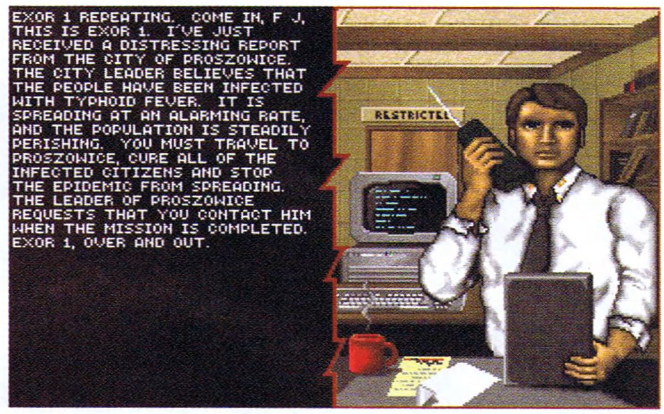
Also save before travelling long distances, as enemy encounters seem to be random and can vary greatly in difficulty. The enemy ground forces in a town will be in the same locations after restoring the game, so the player may wish to get closer to them in his vehicle once he knows their positions before engaging them.

During battle, if enemy 8 destroys the squad's vehicle with a tank breaker or enemy 21 kills a recruit with a grenade launcher (for example), the player may reload a saved position just before the battle and attempt to disable those enemies first as the same numbered enemies will have the same weapons.

Heavy odds

Beware of a message that says an enemy soldier is going to fire, if he appears to do nothing he may be aiming a heavy weapon at the player's tank. If a squad member inflicts critical damage on an enemy it is usually safe to ignore him for a while, especially if it is his right arm. When an enemy is sufficiently injured, his initiative may become 0 or less, incapacitating him until the squad has time to finish him off.

Descriptive or quick combat modes should never be used during ground attacks, especially if a squad member is armed with grenades or a grenade launcher. The computer will fire a grenade at an enemy only a few metres away, regardless of the consequences to the friendly forces.


EXOR 1 REPEATING. COME IN, F J.
THIS IS EXOR 1. I'VE JUST
RECEIVED A DISTRESSING REPORT
FROM THE CITY OF PROSZOWICE.
THE CITY LEADER BELIEVES THAT
THE PEOPLE HAVE BEEN INFECTED
WITH TYPHOID FEVER. IT IS
SPREADING AT AN ALARMING RATE,
AND THE POPULATION IS STEADILY
PERISHING. YOU MUST TRAVEL TO
PROSZOWICE, CURE ALL OF THE
INFECTED CITIZENS AND STOP
THE EPIDEMIC FROM SPREADING.
THE LEADER OF PROSZOWICE
REQUESTS THAT YOU CONTACT HIM
WHEN THE MISSION IS COMPLETED.
EXOR 1, OVER AND OUT.
RESTRICTED

Greg Ellsworth throws some light on Paragon's Twilight 2000

After a successful battle, save the game again and see what things can be found on the enemy bodies. If the squad drove the 2.5-tonne truck to the scene of the battle, heavy items may be transported back in it. The recruits can also exceed their load limit by transferring an item from the ground directly into their inventory using the character display (F4) option. Using this 'cheat', squad members may carry a M2HB in their right hand, a MK-19 in their left, and still have a tank breaker and M60 in reserve.

The ammunition in any recovered weapons seems to be added to the Krakow base supply, so it is useful to pick up weapons that use 7.62mm N, .50 BMG, or 40mm heat grenades.

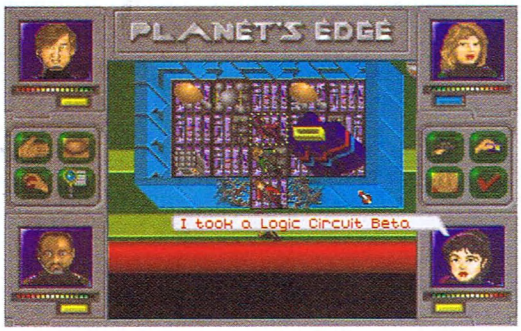
Before returning to base, the squad should call for a doctor to heal the wounded. Although in the early missions the recruits heal automatically over the week's rest they are given, in later battles injuries will remain until treated and will carry over.

Finally, I don't know how to avert the tragedy at Lupuzno, when Czarny murders the child hostages. I don't know if it can be stopped, but war isn't supposed to always have a happy ending – perhaps the designers put that in the game to remind us of that. ❑

Published by
Paragon Software (US), Empire Strategy (UK)

Systems
IBM PC, Amiga

Notes
Reviewed in issue 18



FIRST CONTACT
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ITS RECORDS INDICATE THIS AS A CONTACT POINT FOR OBSERVERS WHO WERE ASSISTING WITH THE FAILED CENTAURI DRIVE EXPERIMENT. THERE ARE SOME SIGNS THAT INDICATE THAT THERE MAY STILL BE LIFE HERE.
ALIEN OUTPOST

Planet's Edge

Where on Earth are you?

By Joan McKeown

Directed by
Eric Hyman and Jon Van Caneghem

Designed by
Eric Hyman, Neal Hallford, Kenneth L Mayfield and Jon Van Caneghem

Published by
New World Computing (US), US Gold (UK)

Systems
IBM PC

PC graphics
VGA, MCGA, EGA

Supports
Adlib, Roland, Sound Blaster and Tandy 3 Voice/DAC sound boards

Gamer alert, gamer alert! Now hear this: the Earth is missing and we gotta save it! First, we have to find it, then we gotta save it. Er, well, before that we have to find the parts of a machine that can save it after we find it. Earth that is. Seems that an alien anomaly has been created, the Earth is hidden in a time-space warp, and the parts of the system needed to restore things to the previous order are scattered throughout the galaxy. Not the solar system mind you, the galaxy!

From these simple story components, New World Computing has presented us with one of the most involved and fascinating game worlds that it has ever been my pleasure to explore: the worlds of **Planet's Edge**. I have logged about 50 hours in the game so far and have barely begun the adventure.

Jumping for Joyce

Planet's Edge is a science fiction role-playing experience that has strategy, combat, character statistic development, trading, exploring, shipbuilding, resource management, navigation, space combat, puzzles, multiple view automapping, hundreds of NPC interactions, and whole lot more. The scope of the game is astounding in its diversity and attention to detail.

The game begins on Moonbase where there is an exploration vessel, the Ulysses, waiting for a crew.

The prime mission for the player is the restoration of Earth and her people, and to do that the crew will have to explore the galaxy and gather the parts and information needed to repair the centauri drive. An engineering diagram of the drive is located in the labs on Moonbase and as each part is returned to Moonbase, it appears on the diagram.

The adventure party consists of four characters that are pre-rolled when the game begins, but a quick trip to the crew quarters allows each of the four to be cloned.

Cloning is the same as rolling a new character. The name is the same but the stats and skills are different. If the entire party gets killed, the gamer is returned to Moonbase and a new party is cloned. A very nice touch here is that the new party has all of the stuff collected by the recently splatted former party.

The warehouse on Moonbase is a source of supplies for the crew and parts for spaceships. Each crew member can build needed supplies and select items for transfer into personal inventory or to the ship. The warehouse is also the source of cargo which can be used for trade during game play. When the crew returns from a successful mission with new discoveries and alien cargo, the warehouse is upgraded and better things can be built. When scientific advances are discovered, better ship parts and bigger ships can be constructed.

Yards apart

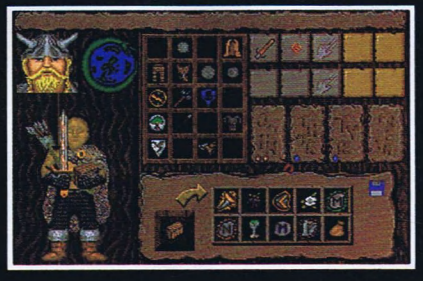
The shipyards allow the player to make modifications on the hull of Ulysses or to construct additional hulls. The game begins with a maximum hull size of 10 which limits the amount of weight that can be carried. Taking the time to adjust the size of engines and weapons will assure room for cargo. One caution: do not go to the shipyards after transferring cargo to the vessel from the warehouse. Cargo is off-loaded automatically when the ship is in the yards.

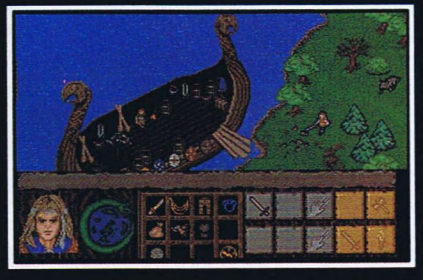
A simple click on the launch pad will send Ulysses off on an adventure and the crew into space mode. Flying the ship can be as easy or as hard as desired. The main viewscreen shows the local area of space and an image of the ship.

When crew members are clicked

Dusk of the Gods

ENTER THE HALLS OF VAHALLA...





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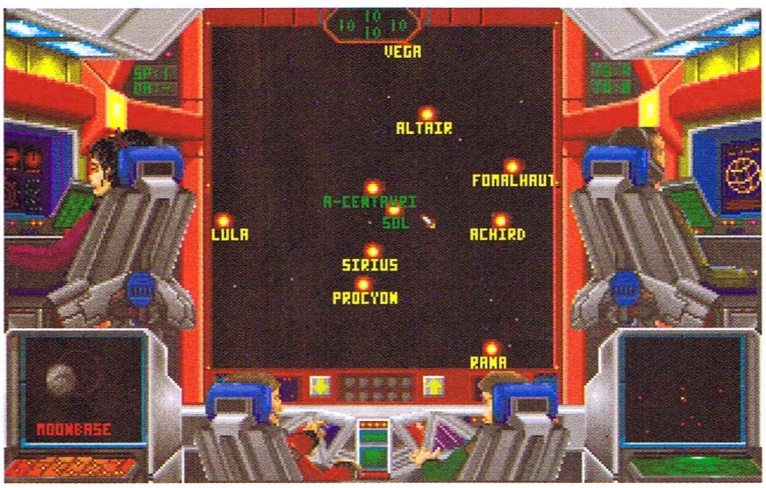
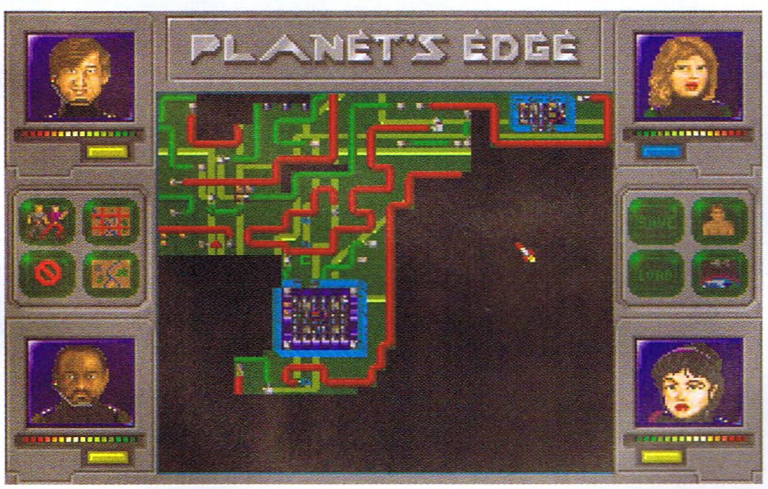
on, option menus appear on the viewscreen. Two smaller viewscreens show a reverse zoom view of the galaxy on the right and a zoom view of the closest planet or star on the left.

When autopilot is engaged, the destination appears on the galactic view. When inside a solar system a dynamic view of the system replaces the galactic image.

Personal inventory is not accessible during space flight, but cargo and ship status are. Only one crew action is supported in space mode: heal crew. This is nice after hostile planets!





Any time the ship passes near a star system it is a good idea to try to enter the system. As soon as a star has been visited it becomes an option on the auto-pilot and appears on the viewscreen starmap in green, which is very helpful when exploring.

Once the ship has reached the star system of choice, a bit of flying around is needed to find alien bases and individual planets. When either appears on the left viewscreen, the ORBIT command can be used, the surface scanned, and a decision made whether or not a landing is in order.

Once the party beams down to the surface of a planet or base, the game really begins. This is the first time the interface appears and it is spectacular in its efficiency and ease of use. Keyboard control is possible, but a mouse is recommended.

Eight dual mode buttons allow sixteen different mouse activated commands. They include the combat icon, cancel command icon, local map view, wide range map view, look, examine, wear/wield, check inventory (examine item), weapon, use (inventory item), pickup, drop, load, save, talk, and the ever important teleportation icon.

The first place my crew explored was the alien outpost in A-Centauri. This was on the advice of our commanding officer. We met and conquered some nasty robots, and found a whole bunch of talking heads that we were able to activate. The heads gave us information about a lot of different systems and galactic sectors, and we chose to try sector Caroli and see if we could locate the Oortizam labs. We just figured that a lab is a likely place to find scientific equipment.

Several trips

We took a quick trip to Moonbase to replenish our supply of trauma kits and first aid kits, then it was off to Cor-Caroli. It's a long trip and a dangerous one unless the ship is fast and the navigator good. The route crosses established trade routes and traders and pirates abound.

The landing party was in for a whale of a surprise. Although this was supposed to be a tourist haven, nasty plants have taken over one of the labs, and 'something awful' has happened to the residents – they are disappearing! Fighting the plants and saving the lab leads to a clue that will send the party to another lab and two locked doors. Exploring the new lab will yield some goodies and a doorpass.

Oops! That door was locked for a reason! As soon as the crew steps into the room they get miniaturized and a whole new level appears: a circuit. Seems that somehow the circuit has been reversed and the crew has to fix it. The fix entails locating the various parts of the circuit that are malfunctioning, rearranging chips in the circuit, and finding a way out of the circuit board. During the exploration, the crew will be hindered by lost inhabitants of the big world and hoards of nasty little microbots. I got real fed up with both types of intrusions and found that violence is most rewarding in this game.

When the crew climbs out of the repaired circuit, two items await. A fancy needle gun and a critical part of the Centauri drive, the gravitic compressor. Returning to the ship and healing were the first things on our minds.

Back to base

Then we returned to Moonbase, and after a one-word copy protection intrusion, we checked out the research lab and there it was, the gravitic compressor. Right there in the middle of the diagram. Surrounded by blank positions for all the rest of the parts. I looked at that screen and chuckled with glee.

Let's see now, one part down, how many more to go? **Planet's Edge** here I come, again! ❑

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MAMA SEZ...

It'll be real soon now

Mama fails to contain her anticipation...

Real soon now (RSN) is the authentic release date for several highly touted games. Many are sequels of popular games; many others are long-advertised, nowhere to be seen revolutions in gaming. Look for **Supergame** in (pick a month) they say... supplies are low, call today. Be the first one on your block to play (pick a sequel, pick an air game).

Mama sez... pick up a good book, real fun is going to be a long time coming.

A real long time! Not because there is any intentional hype around the advertising. None of the companies is deliberately holding up a game to build market. Each is finding things that need to be fixed or making small changes that will make game play better, or somewhere in the put it on a disk and see if it loads stage of development.

The wait for real fun is going to be a long one because chances are that the first shipment of each of these games is going to be flawed. Buggy is the impolite word for it.

Unadvertised features was the phrase one wag used to describe the flaws in version 1.00 of **Might and Magic III** – a cute turn of phrase for a very un-cute situation. Several of the bugs in that one made it impossible to complete the game, and most of them

Hints for a happy 25th anniversary

Big Bad Mama just can't stop Trekkin'

Polish up those arcade skills and get ready to fight all the way in every episode of **Star Trek: 25th Anniversary**. All of the classic adventure game puzzle-solving skills are needed to progress through each episode, but the player needs to fight to get into all but one episode. The fights are real-time combat with the player directing all of the battle actions of the Starship Enterprise. Mama sez...this is not a Piper Cub joyride – the ship could do rolls around an F-16 and come up shooting!

Some strategic ploys for combat involve the judicious use of speed and direction. The craft's speed is controlled by the number keys. 1 is dead stop, 0 is the fastest. The key just to the right of the 1 key, the ' key, is reverse. Mama found that if she let the bad guys get around in back of her then reversed engines, they would fly by and become ducky little targets. Of course, it is essential to get back up to speed quickly for the chase and shoot stuff.

There are two types of weapons available, phasers and photon torpedoes. Phasers are effective and accurate at a distance, but the photon torpedo is a close range weapon. Phasers are most deadly when the target is fleeing or when it is making a turn to come back and shoot. Leading the target is essential. It takes practice, but in some of the combats the player can get off several shots that the target will run into.

Photon torpedoes are slower than the phasers and therefore require a bigger lead on the target. If the target is too far away they will just fly harmlessly underneath it.

The Enterprise can be repaired during battle. If the hull gets too badly damaged, hit the high speed key and run away until the ship is repaired. Unfortunately, enemy damage is also repaired during this type of manoeuvre!

Each battle is different and challenging, but the final battle is a toughie. The Enterprise must face a clone of itself and two Elasi ships that can fire three photon torpedoes at once. It's a nasty spot to be in after conquering seven episodes!

The most efficient strategy for the final battle deals with the clone first. This may sound easy because it is the only ship in the area when the battle begins, but remember that it is a clone of the Enterprise – a perfect match. Mama got real lucky when the ship appeared right in front of her. Stay on

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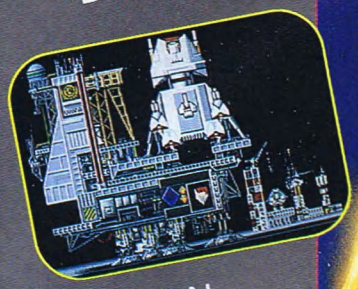
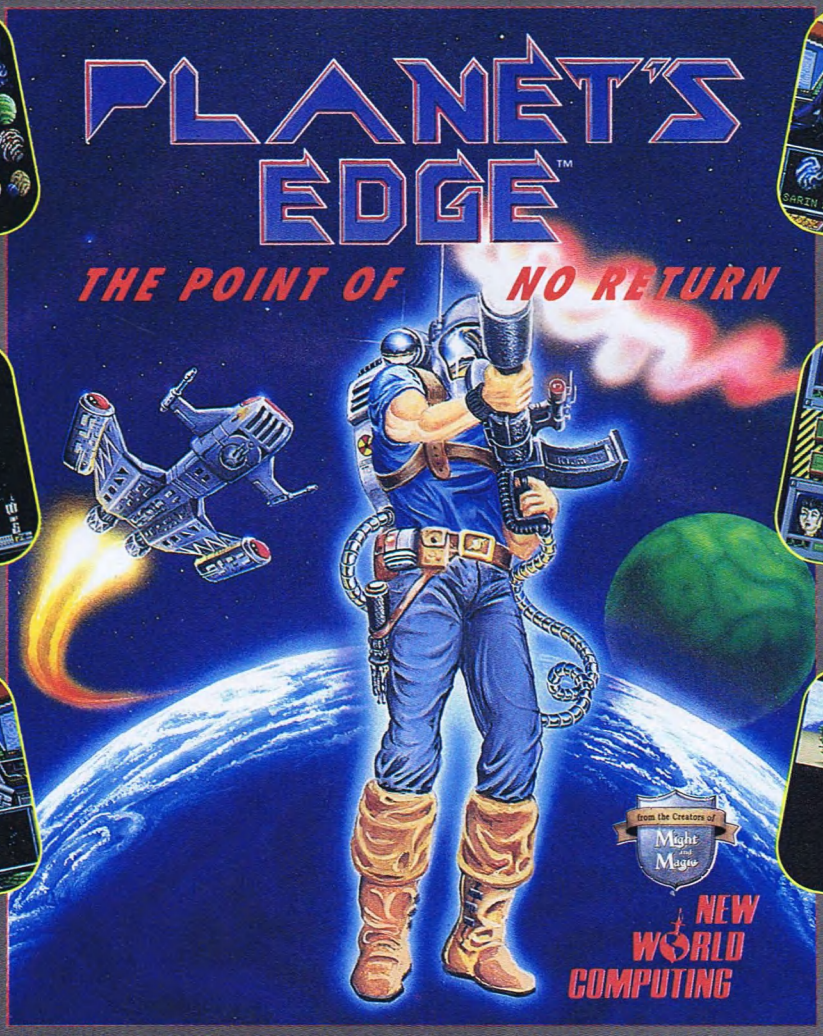


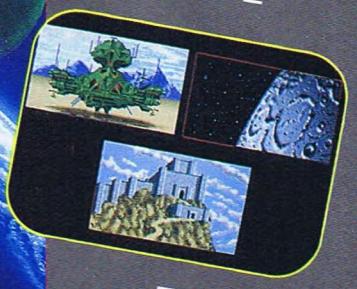
DESIGN

CHALLENGE



INTERACT

SOLVE



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were careless oversights. Incorrect numbers were given for one long formula, the wrong clue was given, critical words were misspelled. This is not game engine problems, this is sloppy product.

Mama sez... if only one beta tester had played the game from start to finish, all of the bugs would have been caught before the game shipped. New World Computing (NWC) quietly issued a new version of the game, but most of the avid gamers like Mama are stuck with the buggy one that we grabbed out of the storekeeper's hands before it even touched the shelf.

We're stuck not because NWC wouldn't replace the disks with new ones – it will. We're stuck because we have already logged a few hundred hours playing the game and are not really that keen on having the working model as a keepsake, especially with the cost and time involved in mailbacks.

Mama is really in a grump over this. Like all of us who enjoy a game, I am anxious to jump right into the sequel or to see what new wonders will come from the same company or author. I am over-anxious I suppose, clamouring with the rest of the gamers for the release date, the game, the fun! We are loud, but the companies have got to stop listening to us... what good are games that pop up right on the predicted release date and are unplayable? No good at all. Well, perhaps the distributors will turn a buck, but that is about it.

Bug brigade

The release of **Magic Candle II: The Four and Forty** is what has cranked Mama up on this topic. The game is stupendous, the bugs are legion. Fortunately, the company is Mindcraft. Within three days of the initial shipment the game disks were recalled and remastered, and updates were shipped to all users – great customer support, truly nice folks.

But if Mindcraft had waited until the game was really ready for release, this wouldn't have happened. People are finding blank scrolls, losing characters, walking on water when they shouldn't be able to, unable to sell items, all kinds of stuff like that. Version 2.00 is supposed to fix everything except the missing character problem. The exchange program is well worth the effort since I found Version 1.00 and 1.00, The Remaster, unplayable.

What this all boils down to is that I am willing to wait until the cows come home for **Wizardry 7: Crusaders of the Dark Savant** if I can be sure that it will work, right out of the box, the first time.

Is this too much to ask? Mama sez... no, not if we are willing to wait for development and testing. Cut the clamour and wait for the glamour. ❑

its tail and fire like mad! Once the clone is history, the Elasi can be dealt with quickly.

Now for some info on the episodes themselves. As with any adventure game, *talk* to everyone, *look* at everything, and try as many different options a possible. In **Star Trek: 25th Anniversary**, it pays to have Spock do the looking with his tricorder. The more information gathered, the higher the episode score.

Episode one

Talk to one another and to everyone in sight. The hand is the key to the mountain but must be repaired first. Note that when there is an eclipse, three things are lined up and there is a minimum of light. A *polite* conversation with the owner of the lab will get Kirk another key. Maximum points are gained if a promise is broken with good intent.

Episode two

Query the computer about the Masada and all other new names. Trickery rather than force will get the landing party aboard the Masada. A good phaser can charge a bad one, and remember a phaser is a phaser. Do seek out the force field and disable it, but do not use the door to enter the bridge – use the repaired transporter. Once on the bridge, control the situation. Phasers can be used without using them.

Episode three

Time is a factor in this episode: poor Spock will die and the game will end if a cure is not found in time. It is necessary to access the database more than once. Medical information is critical. Manufacturing TLDTH gas will allow use of the ventilation system to calm the Romulans. Ammonia is what is needed to start the cure process. Pure water comes in very handy, twice.

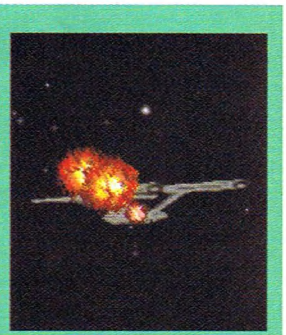
Episode four

Check out Harry Mudd! Sooner or later Mudd must be saved. The compact doover clamp kit is the key to a numbers game. Base three is the name. Life support systems can be doovered. Lost data is the price of the mission.

Episode five

The pre-episode combat can be avoided and should be, just make the right choice in the dialogue (2 then 1). Combat is with 4 or more Klingon ships – Mama never stuck around to count them!

Life starts in the pit. A snakebitten captain is impressive. Quetzecoatl must be brought aboard the Enterprise, the trip to court is automatic. For the test of courage, Spock's tricorder will reveal the winning strategy. Two codes are needed at the keypad, be sure to check with Uhura. Red is the colour of war – totally undesirable. Green is the colour of knowledge; blue is the colour of transport. The peaceful high scorer will not travel.



Episode six

Computer query must include the Lucrs Mathematics system and alphabet. Note that 99 is significant and Scythe is the 17th letter of the alphabet. 99 in base three is 10 200. Rocks can become templates with a lot of laser help.

Stone can be formed in a keycard with the right template and a little energy. Right before left at the computers to avoid a premature ending to the episode.

Episode seven

Check out the captain's log first. Get to the Republic. Be sure to tell Uhura to take the Enterprise to Starbase 24 if another ship appears. The science officer's station and the captain's chair contain vital information. After visiting sickbay is a good time to save the game.

Save again after arriving at Vardaine and chasing down the other ship at warp 8. This is the beginning of the final combat!

Magic Candle 2

The Four and Forty

By Jamie Thompson

It is now 10 years after the events of **Magic Candle 1** and the land of Deruvia is at peace. However, Gurtex , far to the east of Deruvia is still awash with the forces of darkness, ruled over with a fist of iron by the demon Zakhad. King Rebnard of Deruvia has secured a foothold on the island of Oshcrun just west of Gurtex. Yet times are hard and a great hero is needed to save the day again, and why not Lukas, the hero who saved the day last time round.

Unlike traditional CRPGs, characters for the party in **MC2** are pre-set. There is an initial choice of class for the hero or heroine, Lukas/Luka – woodsman, huntress, warrior, swordswoman, or minstrel, which in essence is a ranger, fighter and bard. There is room for up to six characters in the party at any one time, but these must be recruited as the game develops.

Personally, I prefer to create my own characters rather than have them thrust upon me (especially when they have such a plethora of naff and annoying names). The character creation process is fundamental to all role-playing games, and to deliberately opt out of it is a mistake, I believe. I'm sure there'll be lots of people who'd prefer a different approach, but for me it detracts from the stuff of CRPG to be told what my character's name and profession already is.

But what makes the party interesting in **MC2** is that the composition of one's band can be varied. Characters can be sent off to meet later at a certain location, or they can be left in training, or in work. Job training must be paid for, but a character 'on the job' will earn money. In the meantime, other characters may be recruited to fight on those dangerous treks into Gurtex.

Characters have a loyalty stat, and this governs how long they are prepared to wait or work – sometimes they'll just bugger off. Hirelings will remain loyal only so long as they are rewarded with cash. This is all very well, but the problem I ran into was the confusing number of possible party members, making them rather difficult to keep track of.

For example, a record must be kept of whether or not characters have weapons at the ready or not. True, it would interfere in an ordinary conversation in real life if one walked into a food shop with gun in hand, similarly if one walked into a tavern with swords out and arrows nocked. But the whole point of computers is to make life easier for us (I know that's hard to believe but apparently it's true!) and this kind of trivia should be subsumed into the game system.

When outside, a camp will have to be set up for the night. Sleep will regenerate energy points used up in combat, travel and spell casting. Fair enough, but unless characters have blankets they won't make a full recovery. Clothing is also important – thick furs for cold weather but make sure these are not worn in the jungle. Detail like this does not serve any useful purpose, especially when one takes into account the rather long winded way a character puts on or takes off an item of clothing.

The actual movement and combat visuals of **MC2** are akin to the **Ultima** series, with towns and wilderness laid out in 2D overhead view. Unfortunately, Mindcraft has opted for size, scope and detail. Normally, this would be excellent with plenty of sub-plots, people to talk to and so on. But the interface between player and computer game is not at all suited for this.

Spells are quite extensive and varied, organized in books of magic, although spell names are rather unimaginative.

Graphically, it's fairly competent and the game will make some use of a sound board. The accompanying booklet contains 25 paragraphs for additional textual information that is referred to at various stages of the game – this helps to create a little extra atmosphere and flavour. Combat is fairly straightforward, in the 2D overhead mode and similar to that in the **AD&D** CRPGs.

It's all too much

All in all, **Magic Candle 2** remains a rather unsatisfying game. This is a shame as it is clear a lot of work has gone into plot and background – dare I say too much.

The real problem is the interface between player and characters. Getting someone to enter a shop and buy something is a boring process. Getting an audience with the king means having to laboriously trudge one's way through a large and extensive castle in search of the throne room. The end reult was that I simply could not maintain a level of interest to continue playing. ❑

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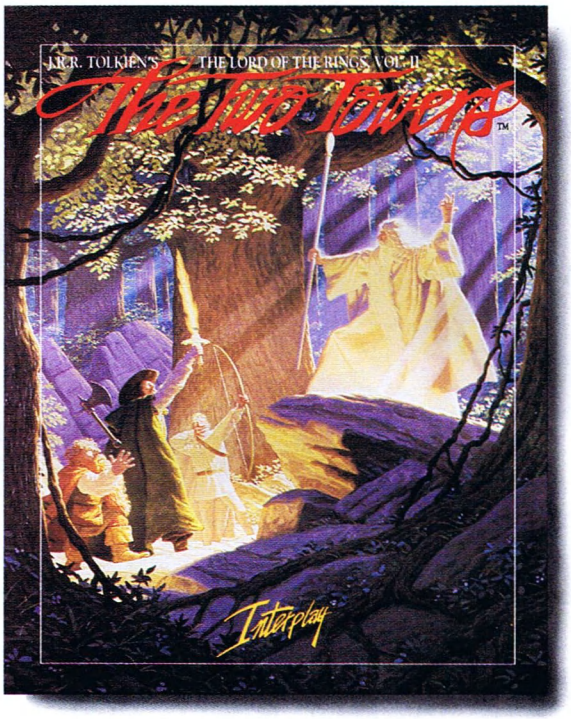

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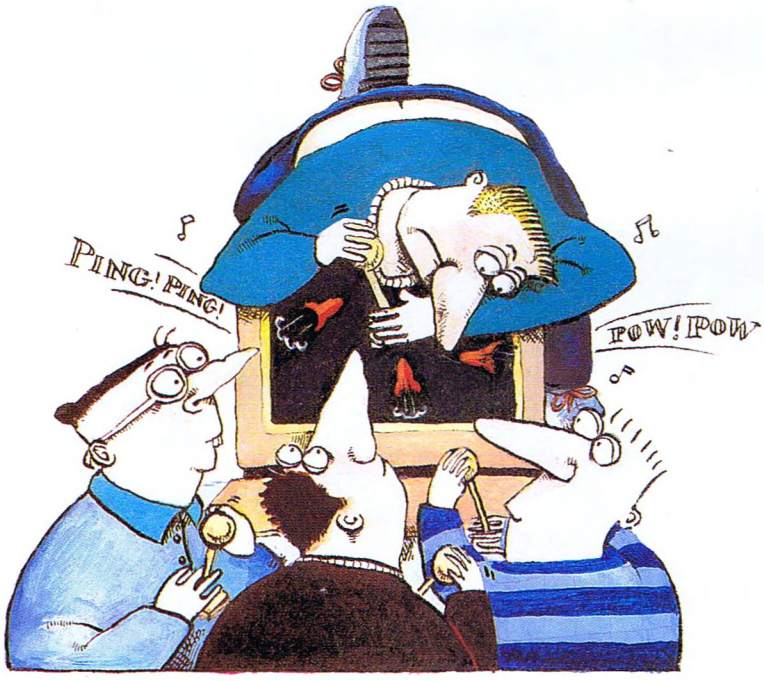
PLAY WITH EACH OTHER

And not with yourself, says Global Conquest designer Dan Bunten

Around here we like this saying so much we've made that our company slogan, and it fits. Since 1979 we've done one six-player game (**Cartels & Cutthroats**), four four-player games (**Wheeler Dealers**, **MULE**, **Robot Rascals** and **Global Conquest**), and four two-player games (**Computer Quarterback**, **Cytron Masters**, **Modem Wars**, **Command HQ**). Never mind that our two solo-player games (**Seven Cities of Gold** and **Heart of Africa**) sold more copies than all the multi-player games put together. We have our priorities!



Actually, I just recently rediscovered my priorities. A couple of months ago I was ready to quit the business. I was depressed about the way my products sell and the way my publishers have always beat me up. ('You need hotter graphics, Dan.' 'You can't compete without more A/V heat.') I was deep into debugging our latest project and trying to figure ways to 'spiff it up' with our pitifully limited art budget and minimal in-house talents, when I made up my mind.

'This is my last game,' I told Chris Crawford, Sid Meier, Eric Goldberg and any other games designers who happened to call around then. They were all wonderfully complimentary and supportive, but I was still sure that after I'd finished this one, I'd try a new career. Don't laugh, but teaching pre-school seemed appealing: a job where I spent my day playing with happy little people was the change I needed.

It was the height of irony that the game that was going to tie all my divergent interests together was also going to be my swan song. When we started **Global Conquest** we described it to people as **Command HQ** meets **Seven Cities** meets **MULE**. It was going to have the clean and simple interface and battle mechanics of **Command HQ**. It would have a randomly generated world to discover like **Seven Cities**. And it would have the four-opponents, random events and generally funny/funky 'feel' of **MULE**. When we started I was really excited about the design challenges.

So with high hopes the project started in April '91. The first couple of months were spent cleaning up the **Command HQ** code to use as a foundation for the new game.

The next several months were spent actually writing new code. JD Robinson, my new programming partner, spent most of his time programming the world builder routines. He did a fantastic job with it. It makes worlds with 30 000 terrain blocks of 64 types in only seconds (compared with **Seven Cities** with a world size of 8,000 and **Empire** with 1300 that take minutes!).

While JD was working on that, I concentrated on the units and their interaction. I decided to use a basic set of Second World War unit types (infantry, tanks, subs, battleships, carriers and planes) since they are so

intuitive to most of us. We have notions of what each should do in relation to the others and that makes learning the game a much simpler proposition. This was despite the fact that we had sold the idea to Microprose as an alien conquest game which supposedly would have a science fiction theme. Somehow I just couldn't bring myself to use anti-grav vehicles and laser blasters.

Next we worked on the unit movement system. In **CHQ** you could click on a ship and click on its destination and it would get there using normal sea lanes. There were technical problems to solve with duplicating that system, built around a fixed Mercator projection of the earth in **CHQ**, to a random world. In a world with enough random inlets, peninsulas and bays to be interesting it was a bear to figure out optimum ship paths. We got most of it working before we found out that 'click the unit then click the destination' was not a very good idea. It took all the fun out of discovering the world. So instead, we came up with an interface that allowed users to click the unit and set intermediate destinations before the final.

All together, the movement system of **Global Conquest** came out clean and simple and yet more powerful than either **Modem Wars** or **Command HQ**. And it took less memory too! At this stage in the work I was having fun. Creating elegant solutions to complex problems is what game designers love.

Much of the other work went pretty well also. I just duplicated the combat system from **CHQ** (without nukes) except that I added a bunch of features to the planes.

The big nasty jobs began with the economic system. I settled on the 'cities build units and units take different times to complete' design. I liked the simplicity of it, but it sure wasn't innovative. To add a little more interest I made cities have different speeds of building and then replaced 'speed with 'money'. This way different cities earned income at different rates, but units could cost a fixed amount. To this quasi-economic model I added support costs for units. This allowed me to insure that players could never reach the unit limits. (I got beat up pretty bad, justifiably, I guess, about the 'too many units' error in **CHQ**). After adding unit support as a city's responsibility I had to add ways to display and modify it.

Random events

And so in November 1991, after more than six months of work, we were still not ready to start playtesting (which I had hoped to begin months earlier). We still had random events to do and a lot of stuff about the multi-player environment to work out (alliances, team-mates, multiple people on a machine, and so on).

Although it was thoroughly untested, I felt sure that a modified turn system would actually be a good idea for this product. The intense and frantic activity that **CHQ** required during some stages of the battle really turned some people off. Even the ability to set a different fixed speed of action didn't seem sufficient. But I didn't want a true turn based system because for multi-machine play it would be very boring waiting for the other player. Also, I like the way real-time handles movement and resolves battles.

What I was working on when all the bugs invaded was a punctuated real-time system. After a certain number of 'ticks' (during which units move and fight) the game would pause. This pause we called the orders phase (a very original name) during which players would revise their units' plans, do air missions, initiate new unit manufacturing, etc. By offering a variety of ways to end the orders phase we could appeal to the widest possible gamer audience. It sounded good and looked like it would work well for both multiple machines and multiple players on one machine. *But*, it wasn't working at all and it was causing me no end of grief.

Business end

So this was when I decided to quit the biz. We had over six months of work into something that was built around a lot of untested notions: things like time warps and space pirates in a war game, spies and a comcen (units I stole from **Modem Wars**), and my weird turn design. Then, you add to that the fact that the artist we had hired was not coming through (our graphics looked pitiful even by *my* standards). It was definitely a low point.

Well, I got through the gloomy debugging. We worked out a way to improve our graphics by increasing the resolution. (It's amazing how much better the same iconic style of graphics look with 4 times as many pixels!) We found some great artists (Peter and Caitlin Mitchell-Dayton).

But what really made a difference in my attitude was when we got to start playing the game with other people. At the same time my partner, JD, (who had his own office till then) moved his equipment into my 'office' (two large rooms on the back of my house) and we started working together. It was amazing how our productivity improved! We'd play the game, fix some stuff and play again.

Next, we invited our manual writer, Scott Osborn, to move his stuff in too. We'd work on the manual, play the game and then code some. We invited lots of folks over each evening and started really testing the game play.

We were in crunch mode working 12 to 14 hours a day, seven days a week. We had a deadline staring us in the face and more things to do than could possibly be done. But we were having fun! In the last week I got the four players on four machines version working and we really started playing together. Not since **MULE** have I had so much fun finishing a game.

But most importantly, I discovered that I didn't have to teach pre-school to find a bunch of happy little people to play with. Inside every adult is a little kid (as my wife, the psychologist, has told me) and that's the person who comes out when we play together. In creating a good multi-player game I built a good multi-player environment where my little kid could play. That's why I got in this business in the beginning – to play with my friends even during business hours! And that's why I'll stay in the business.

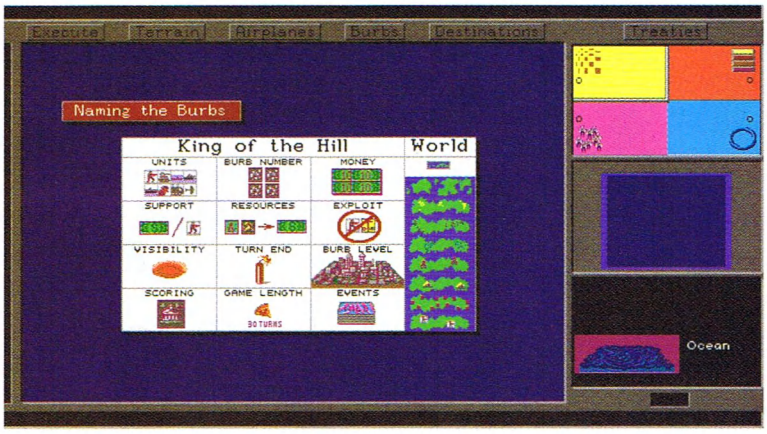
What's next? You can bet it'll be a multi-player game. Anyone interested in a game of **MULE** II? ❑

***Global Conquest** is reviewed on page 56.*

Global Conquest

Going native

By Mike Woodhouse



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IBM PC

PC graphics
High-res EGA, VGA

Supports
Adlib and Sound Blaster sound boards; mouse, keyboard

Players
1-4

Notes
Can be played over two computers with either null or full modem links, or, four computers linked by null modem cables, or, one 'host' computer with three serial ports and three modems and one remote computer. You can even play by yourself! Version 0.92 reviewed

It looks like 1992 could be the year of multi-player, multi-computer games. The US market has probably been ready for a year or two now, with its large number of installed modems, and the UK is starting to catch up. The increasing presence of local-area networks (LANs) in the working environment is also an influence, because let's face it, games do get played at work.

Multi-player computer games, especially the strategy variety, have always suffered from the musical chairs syndrome, which requires rather more dedication than most players can muster regularly.

The answer has always been modem play, but the market has needed to become large enough to encourage publishers to address it. If modem play is implemented, then it's no big deal to add null-modem links for direct communication between computers and, once the protocols are understood, LANs can be supported as well.

Microprose usually has its fingers pretty well on the pulse, and **Global Conquest** offers single-player, modem, and null-modem permutations.

Global Conquest is really a computer-moderated boardgame, but a nicely implemented one for all that. Four players (the computer makes up the numbers if necessary) start at opposite corners of a square playing areas and attempt to achieve a predefined objective by means of combat.

Units available are infantry, armour, spies, planes, battleships, carriers, submarines and the command centre (a kind of amphibious battleship – one only per player). These may be produced using the money generated by the cities owned (captured) by the player.

Swamped by choice

A variety of configuration options are presented in addition to the scenarios supplied. The number of cities given to each player, the amount of money, the distribution of mountains, forests, swamps (and even land masses) are just a few of the variables which may be modified. The playing area is randomly generated so there's no question of being bored with the same map.

Of particular importance is the number of 'native' cities on the playing area. These are 'neutral', which generally means that they are easier pickings than the cities of other players. Too many native cities and players will tend to ignore each other and go for short-term gains. Of course, scenarios where points are scored by killing opponents' units tend to work rather differently.

In scenarios where victory is determined by the number and type of cities held, the native capital has a huge significance – it is well-nigh impossible to lose if this is held because it is worth 2500 points (full-size cities are worth only 50). It's also well-nigh impossible to take, but the reward is enough to make it worth trying.

Great leveller

Three levels of play are possible, the relative strength of the players being set by adjusting the costs of units and the amount of starting cash in each city, extra cities accruing to players with the more generous starting ranks. The easiest level, General, is only worth using for an introductory game or two; once familiarity with the mechanisms has been achieved, players should quickly find themselves moving on to Captain, and finally Corporal level.

Although the ranks seem inverted, they are indicative of the level of privilege granted to the player. The computer players can be similarly handicapped. Although by default they are Corporals, the experienced player (or inexperienced masochist) can make them Generals, while remaining but a lowly non-com.

Movement is carried out by clicking the mouse on the chosen unit and moving the pointer to the desired final location. A line of dots shows the path to be taken.

Although armour and infantry units are, in effect, amphibious, turning themselves into transports when taking to the oceans, they take several turns to disembark. It is therefore possible to set up to three intermediate points in the move of the selected unit in order to steer that unit more precisely. A nice touch is the ability to see all the currently ordered movements of a faction's units, presented in an aesthetically pleasing way as a set of small squares joined by thin coloured lines. Indeed the whole game is very attractive graphically.

Once all units have been ordered (or when an optional time limit for movement orders has expired), the player selects the 'execute' button. When all players have finished ordering, the simultaneous movement and

combat phase starts. Movement is carried out as a series of eight steps, with combat occurring in any step where it is possible, usually when opposing units are within one or two squares of each other.

Treaties can be made with any opponents. Three levels of treaty are possible, from cease-fire through alliance to team-mates, where each side may order the other's units. To increase (or reduce) the degree of the relationship, the treaty option is re-selected, so that acceptance of a treaty offer from an opponent with whom the faction already has a cease-fire will result in an alliance.

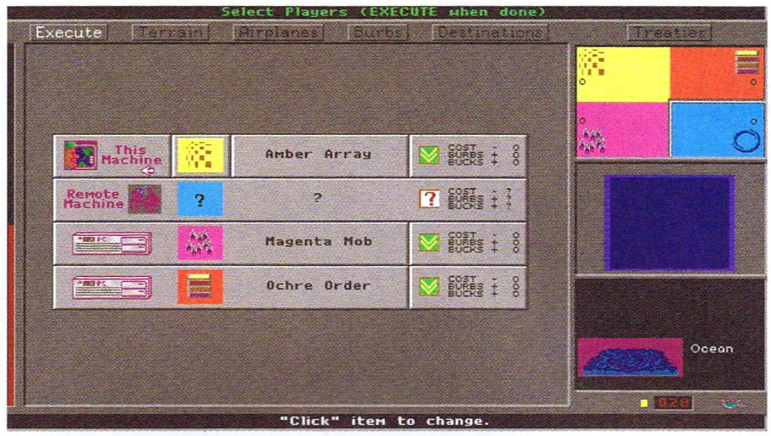
Because this is a wargame, it is inevitable that units will be killed in action and will have to be replaced. New units are built in cities (or towns or villages).

Each devotes all the income it generates to the production of a new unit, but must additionally support any units that already have the location as their home.

Units able to be produced depend on the scenario: in some more economic games it is necessary to own resource production areas (oil and minerals) to produce anything other than infantry. It usually takes several turns to produce a new unit, even infantry (the cheapest), so pointless sacrifice in combat is generally to be avoided.

Road to victory

The game comes with a number of predefined scenarios that cover the various victory criteria. Creating a new scenario is quick and easy, the options being presented as a series of radio buttons. It takes a couple of minutes to describe the game required and get under way.



Emphasising the boardgame feel of the game, an event card is drawn every five turns. There are two sets – wild and tame – which have effects ranging from mild (spies ineffective for five turns) through drastic (floods reduce land area – armour and infantry may become transports) to silly (left and right reversed for five turns). If the player(s) feel that the events detract from the seriousness of the occasion, event cards can be turned off.

Each faction has its own identifying icon, which can be selected from a broad variety. In addition, truly dedicated players can design their own icons using the simple program supplied. It's irrelevant to game play, but shows the attention to detail of the designers.

So what we have here is a fairly simple game, not too heavy, which is nicely presented and offers a good selection of options. In all, a good piece of software which wouldn't waste anyone's disk space.

This might sound like damning with faint praise and to a small extent it is. Where **Global Conquest** really scores, and what lifts it into the higher realms of gaming software is the modem play. Native cities need to be kept relatively low if plenty of player interaction in this mode is required, since player-owned cities are generally harder to take than native cities (with the exception of the native capital).

A neat option is to set not only a time limit on order-giving, which prevents opponents getting bored with waiting, but also to offer an incentive for speedy play by giving a $5 bonus to the player who terminates their order phase first. This bonus, paid into the treasury, can be transferred to any friendly town to speed up unit production.

Turn on

I found that a typical 30-turn game, which in the simpler scenarios is usually enough for on player to obtain a clear, if not decisive advantage, takes about 45 minutes, which makes it affordable even for UK players.

Certainly the first series I played ran to three games back-to-back, always a good sign (I'm embarrassed to have to report that after much practice I still lost 2-1 to our august editor). The communications link seems to be pretty efficient – I only have a 2400 baud modem, but it seemed plenty fast enough to keep the game rolling along, unlike other play-by-modem games I have come across, where low baud was a definite handicap.

Once the market is established for multi-player multi-computer strategy games, the possibilities start to become interesting. If Microprose can put itself at the forefront of this type of gaming software, it is going to make the 1990s a great time to be a computer gamer.

Global Conquest, while not immediately addictive, is a grower, and it's as good a play-by-modem as I've come across to date. ❑

MODEM HANG UPS

Steven Wartofsky provides expert analysis

As someone who has been using modems since Hayes introduced its 300bps model as the cutting edge of technology in the early 1980s, I can state with conviction that a modem, once properly ensconced in a computer system, becomes as invisible and reliable as a telephone, and almost as crucial. With things set up right, the modem makes communication between the home computer and other computers, network services, online databases and world mainframe networks, all utterly transparent.

The problem is getting past the initial stage of modem anxiety. Like other similar technological fears, modem anxiety is primarily the end product of the systematic propaganda work engaged in by a techno-elite committed to ruling the world by mystifying the average user to the point that he thinks he'll require the services of a series of expensive (and expensively trained) professionals just to get started. Well, maybe not all that – but in any event, herewith a brief introduction meant to demystify the whole process. Read this and you'll be in business by noon tomorrow.

A modem, put simply, is just the kind of telephone a computer needs in order to call its friends. It's either a board which fits in a slot inside the computer (a seriously complicated process, which involves inserting the board in the slot), or a little box which connects by a cable to one of the serial ports on the computer (also a really complex process which requires deep plugging-in skills).

Like a telephone, a modem also needs to be connected to the phone line, and if the modem salesman is honest, the requisite connecting wire will be in the box along with the modem. Plug the phone line in at the modem end, at the wall outlet, and, voila! Everything's set!

Pass the port

Well, not quite. There are some little switches on the back of the modem/modem card (usually accessible from outside the computer box, fear not, even if it's a card) which need to be configured so that the modem is accessing the right communications port. On most IBM clones, that would be COM2 (COM1 is usually used by a mouse). Set those switches as the manual suggests for COM2, make sure if it's external that the modem's plugged into the COM2 serial port, and now we're ready to call Agnes to ask for the latest stock reports.

Well, almost. There's the software part. Some modems come with a version of Procomm, a former shareware modem program that will access the modem hardware from the computer. Procomm comes with its own little manual, a careful read of which will bring the whole happy process to a complete halt. Suffice it to say that all that's necessary is knowledge of what speed modem is being used, and what communications port it's connected to (we already took care of the latter).

Baudy humour

Modems come at different baud rates (nothing to do with the price of doxies), which are the rates at which the modem hardware can transmit data over the phone line. Currently, 2400 baud is the recommended minimum, 9600 is an ideal investment for the near future, and faster than that is important only if massive amounts of financial data need to be lifted wholesale from the London Stock Exchange.

Telling the software program in its configuration screen what baud rate the modem works at, and what COM port it's connected to, is almost all the information it will need to know. Most networks use 8 bits of data and 1 stop bit for transmission at full duplex; what that all means is unimportant, just set things up that way and chances are good that now everything will be peachy. Find a number which a network, BBS or other computer uses, tell the software to dial it, and welcome to the world of inter-computer data communication.

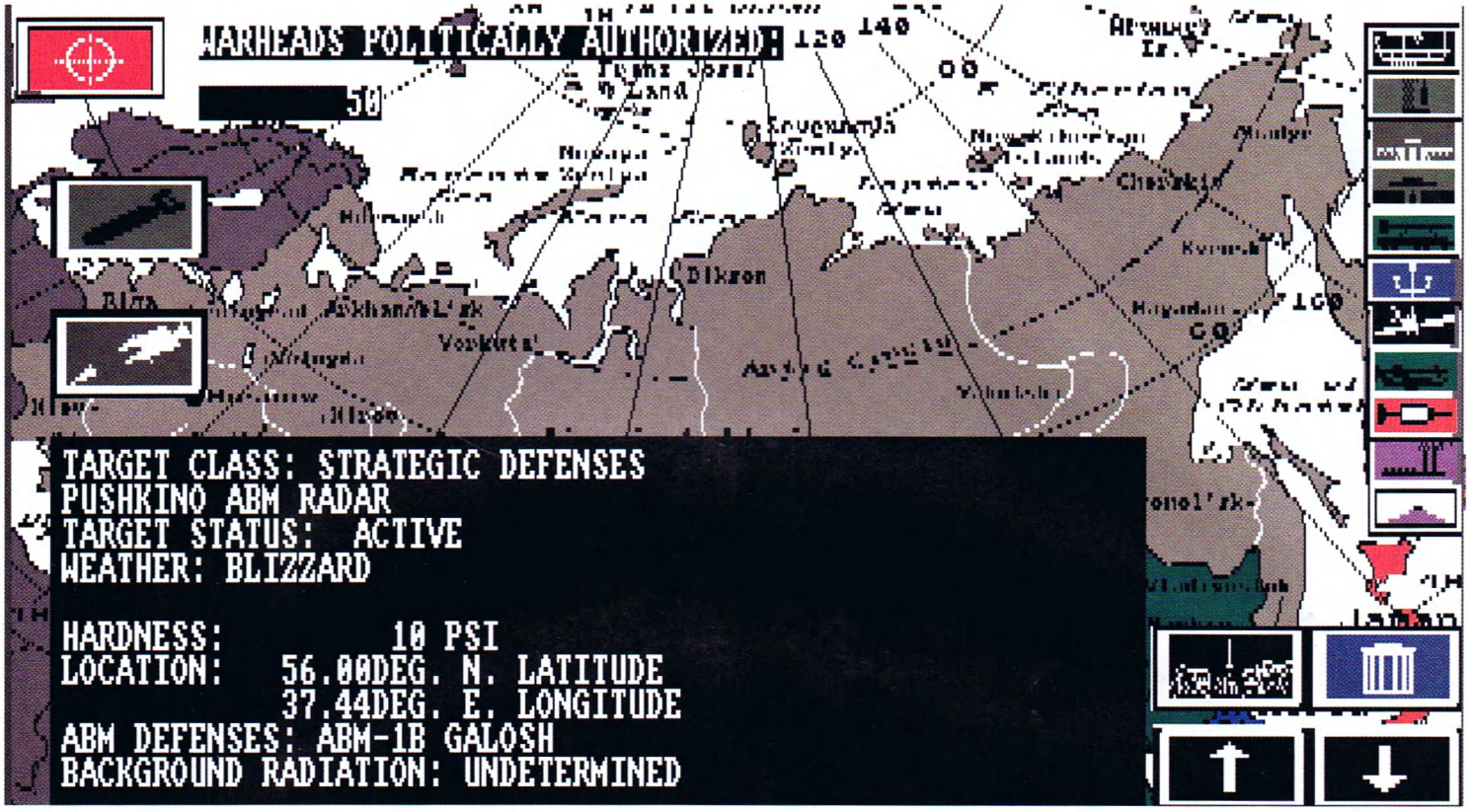
There are many brands of modem out there, some costing literally five times as much as others which essentially do the same thing. The difference in price has mainly to do with the guaranteed integrity of the data being transmitted; very high quality modems selling for $500 are mainly for places like banks, which might close down a small country's economy for a week should they drop the wrong bits in the process of transmission across a noisy phone line.

For gaming purposes, the no-name cheapie models will do. To go somewhere between those extremes, the modems made by Practical Peripherals, Supra, Avatex/Promodem and US Robotics/Miracom Couriers will all do just fine; they're likely to be more noise-resistant than the cheaper models (and thus freer of errors in transmission, those things that can scramble a data connection and require a quick hang-up and re-dial to get things flowing again), yet cheap enough to prove a reasonable investment for the long haul.

With a good modem and the right software, the world is open to any user who wants it; there are a number of major networks, like Compuserve, Genie and Cix, as well as a wide range of independents, that offer extensive varieties of games-playing as well as important information access options in a number of fields.

Compuserve has Grolier's Encyclopedia and Peterson's Guide to US Colleges online all the time, obviating the need to buy home CD-ROM copies. In the future, databases such as these might serve as international libraries rivalling the biggest and best currently present. Get a modem and get ready to access. ❑

BRAVO ROMEO DELTA



ATTENTION... THIS IS NOT A DRILL!

During a major Soviet naval exercise, 50% of the ballistic missile subs are deployed to sea and a limited nuclear strike is launched on American targets. At 3:58AM NORAD picks up the first incoming nuclear warheads, targeted for US Air Bases, and with less than 6 minutes to impact.

SS-18 Satan: The largest, most powerful ICBM ever built, the SS-18 is a two stage, liquid propelled 'heavy' missile. Available with either a single, highly accurate, high yield warhead, or 10 MIRVs (multiple independently targeted reentry vehicle), the Pentagon claims that the SS-18 was "specifically designed to attack and dstroy ICBM silos and other hard targets" in the USA.

As the Chief Target Planner at the Strategic Air Command, it is your responsibility to launch a limited second strike. The targets selected should demonstrate the resolve of your political leadership, while not escalating the conflict.

Defined by the Federal Preparedness Agency (FPA), a controlled conflict is, in part, one in which the contending powers use or threaten to use military force, including nuclear weapons on a scale restricted enough to avoid precipitating a general war.

This concept of Escalation Control is the strategic policy embodied in the Presidential Directive 59 (PD-59) which states that the U.S should be able to initiate the limited or selected use of strategic nuclear weapons, and to control the escalation process in such a way that democracy would continue to "prevail" in the post-war world.

Single Shot Kill Probability (SSP_k)
Given a warhead yield (Y) in kilotons, accuracy in meters, and target blast hardness (H) in PSI, the following equation is used:

$$SSP_k = 1-(0.5)^x$$

Where x can range from:

$$x = (1340Y^{1/3} / Accuracy)^2$$

for soft targets (0-50 PSI hardness) to

$$x = ((438Y^{1/3}/H^{1/3})/Accuracy)^2$$

for hard targets (over 1000 PSI)

More than 80 percent of Soviet ICBMs, carrying more than 95 percent of the Soviet ICBM-based warheads are ready to be launched within minutes from their day-to-day alert status. 30 to 40 percent of Soviet SSBNs are on day-to-day alert, with roughly 20 percent of Soviet SSBNs on station at any given time to launch retaliatory strikes. -- Potapov, I.N. Nauchno-tekhicheskiy progress i'flot (Voyenizdat, 1977) p. 129

*(From the **Bravo Romeo Delta** Designer's Notes)*

The implementation of PD-59 is your job. **Bravo Romeo Delta** gives you complete command of U.S. Strategic forces, including ICBMs, SLBMs, SSBNs, Bomber Bases, and provides you with all tactical warning and attack assement complements of NORAD. This is a real-time simulation, with no punches pulled.

When you've perfected the US strategy you can switch sides and become the Commander of the Strategic Rocket Forces for the U.S.S.R. Within the same scenario, you must prepare to respond to the American counterstrike, while adhering to the Soviet nuclear targeting strategy, and shifting the CoF (Corelation of Forces) in favor if the U.S.S.R.

Bravo Romeo Delta has a suggested retail price of $59.95.
Amiga version available soon.
MS-DOS version available Spring.

Free Spirit Software

Free Spirit Software
720 Sycamore St
Columbus, IN 47201
(812) 376-9964

À LA MODEM

Brian Walker lists the modem-play options

Simulations

Falcon 3.0
Spectrum Holobyte
Systems: PC
Capable of full and null modem connections and Novell network. Plans to link up in the Electronic Battlefield with the forthcoming **A10**.
Reviewed issue 16.

Flight Simulator 4
Sublogic
Systems: PC
Full and null modem capable.

Knights of the Sky
Microprose
Systems: PC, Amiga
Null modem and full modem link supported. World War I dogfights. Woof! Woof!
Reviewed issue 5.

Tank
Spectrum Holobyte
Systems: PC
Supports full and null modem connections.

688 Attack Sub
Electronic Arts
Systems: PC
Supports null and full modem connections. Surprisingly the only sub sim that supports modems.

Falcon
Spectrum Holobyte
Systems: PC, Amiga, Macintosh, Atari ST
All versions capable of cross-platform play. All versions support full and null modem connections.

Tracon II
Wesson International/Mindscape
Systems: PC
Compatible with **MS Flight Simulator 4.0**. Full and null modem capable air traffic control/stress simulator. Windows 3.0 version reviewed in issue 18.

F-16 Combat Pilot
Electronic Arts/Digital Integration
Systems: PC, Amiga, Atari ST
Does not support cross-platform capability. Amiga and Atari ST support null connections only. IBM supports full and null modem play.

Below: Command HQ

Falcon AT
Spectrum Holobyte
Systems: PC, Amiga, ST
Supports null-modem cable connections only.

Flight of the Intruder
Spectrum Holobyte
Systems: PC, Amiga, Atari ST
Amiga and Atari ST versions capable of cross-platform play. Supports Null-cable connections only. Nifty flight sim based on crap movie.
Reviewed issue 1.

Sports

Stunt Driver
Spectrum Holobyte
Systems: PC
Supports full and null modem connections.

Vette!
Spectrum Holobyte
Systems: PC, Mac
Cross-system capability. Driving game.

NFL Pro League Football
Interplay
Systems: PC
Gridiron game that supports stats downloading from a BBS.
Reviewed issue 14.

Lotus Turbo Challenge
Gremlin Graphics
Systems: Amiga, ST
Supports null modem link only, but can handle four players via use of a split screen.

Strategy

Wordtris
Spectrum Holobyte
Systems: PC
Supports both null modem and full

modem play. Real time word game. Reviewed issue 16.

Faces
Spectrum Holobyte
Systems: PC, Amiga, Macintosh
All versions capable of cross-platform play. Full and null modem connections supported. Real time puzzle game.

Empire
Interstel
Systems: PC, Amiga, Atari ST, Macintosh
All versions are cross-platform capable. Seminal strategy game. Turn-based, supporting file transfer over full modem connection. **Empire II** is due to be published later this year.

Omega
Origin
Systems: PC, Amiga, Atari ST, Macintosh, C64/128, Apple IIE, C, Plus
Turn based design-your-own-tank game. Ideal for those looking for something to do for the next decade.

Armor Alley
Three Sixty Pacific/EA
Systems: PC, Mac
Mac version supports Appletalk. Fast paced arcade/strategy game.
Reviewed issue 13.

Battle Chess
Interplay/EA
Systems: PC, Apple IIGS, Amiga, Atari ST, Macintosh (B&W only), Mac CD-Rom, PC CD-Rom
Animated chess.

Battle Chess II
Interplay
Systems: PC, Amiga
Animated Chinese chess.
Reviewed issue 3

Checkmate
Interplay
Systems: PC, Mac
Compatible with **Battle Chess**. Non animated chess.

Lexicross
Interplay
Systems: PC
Null modem and full modem link supported. Excellent word game in a quiz show format.
Reviewed issue 8.

Armour-Geddon
Psygnosis

Mission Description
Review Objectives
Intelligence Report
Prepare Friendly Forces
Proceed To Mission
20
40
60
80
100
WELCOME TO THE FIRING RANGE. YOUR MISSION IS TO DESTROY FOUR JEEP UNITS SET UP IN VARIOUS LOCATIONS TO THE EAST AND NORTHEAST OF YOU. YOU SHOULD TRAVEL ALONG THE ROADWAY TO MAKE SURE YOU WILL SPOT ALL OF THE ENEMY UNITS. THE JEEPS HAVE BEEN ARMED WITH AUTO-LOADING MACHINE GUNS TO INCREASE YOUR INCENTIVE TO COMPLETE THE MISSION WITHIN 30 MINUTES. GOOD LUCK.

Left: Fireteam 2200

Systems: Amiga, Atari ST, PC
Null modem connections only. Real time futuristic strategy/flight sim.
Reviewed issue 10.

Populous
Electronic Arts
Systems: Amiga, PC, Atari ST
All platforms cross-system capable. Overrated real-time game.

Populous II
Systems: ST and Amiga
See **Populous** *passim*.
Reviewed issue 16.

Powermonger
Electronic Arts
Systems: ST, Amiga, PC (due soon)
Real time conquest now sporting a World War 1 expansion disk.
Reviewed issue 5.

Command HQ
Microprose
Systems: PC
Real time global wargame. Highly recommended. Reviewed issue 5.

Global Conquest
Microprose
Systems: PC
Reviewed this issue.

The Perfect General
QQP/Ubisoft
Systems: PC, Amiga
Cross-compatible over null and full modem link. Excellent turn-based wargame.
Reviewed issue 13.

Fireteam 2200
RAW/Storm
Systems: PC, Amiga
Null and full modem support, cross-compatible real-time futuristic wargame.

Coming soon

Buzz Aldrin's Race into Space (Interplay), **Robosport** for the PC and Amiga (Maxis), **Fleet Commander** (Raw/Storm), **Theatre of War** (Three-Sixty Pacific), **Links** (Access).

Left: 688 Attack Sub

COMMANDER CRUNCH REPORTS FROM THE HANGAR

Commander Crunch doubles up over Knights of the Sky

Hey ho, well here we are back again after a long weekend spent combing the Uplands for a flat place to land and picnic. There's nothing like taking some friends along for the ride.

Speaking of which, is your computer companion getting tired of your company? Is it losing interest in attempting to match wits in the air against your wetware? Does it want a vacation from your relentless urge to compete?

Have no fear, multi-player air combat is here – and in such a variety of forms, too. **Flight Simulator 4.0**, **Knights of the Sky**, and **Falcon 3.0** all have very effective built-in modem play capabilities, and provide a chance to experience realistic formation flying and dogfighting like nothing else out there.

It's realistic because there's just an indescribable thrill in knowing that one of the on-screen objects on your CRT is under the control of an actual human being (assuming one can grant the person at the other end of the modem that status, of course). No matter how good the artificial intelligence or the illusion of wizard flying on the part of the computer opponent, there's simply a limit to the joy of knowing another silicon brain has been forced to suffer the ignominy of defeat during play. Computers, after all, do not gnash teeth, pull hair, yell, scream, shout, curse, gesticulate or simply weep in despair in reaction to the action.

Even though none of this stuff titillates the phone lines during modem play, there's no question it's out there when the flaming phoebe plunging towards the welcoming arms of mother earth is run by a human being. No question at all. And be honest, now, the pleasure of the chase comes out of the potential to make someone else suffer mightily in lieu of oneself, right?

So down to business. First, to address the ladies and gents out there early so they can leave before the blood and spittle starts to fly, we consider **Flight Simulator 4.0.**

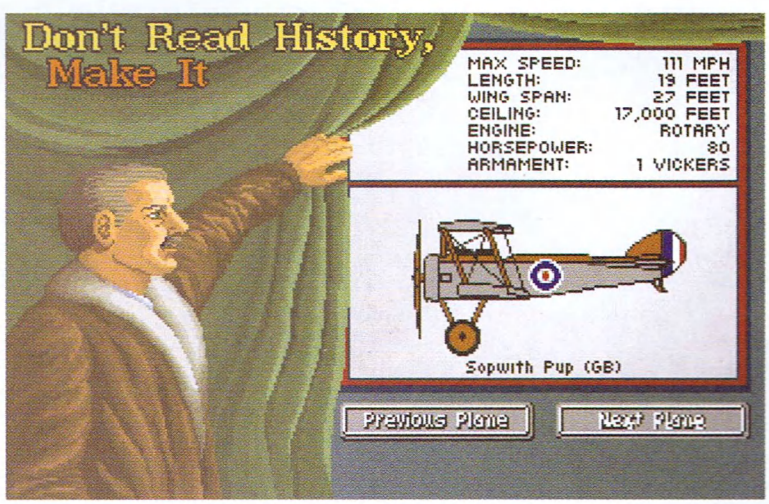
FS4 is great for simulating a meeting at some favourite aerodrome and either taking a pal on a tour of the local countryside, or challenging him to fly in formation into a perfect nose-to-tail landing. I've found the best policy is to agree ahead of time, either by phone or at the local pub, on common initial settings for both systems (weather, complexity, time of year and so on), and then to choose a particular airport to start out from.

The person doing the calling should perhaps provide a custom plane, with custom colours or insignia, and tell the person at the answering end what to look out for, and where, at the airport, especially if there's any dynamic scenery crawling about.

Crazy Commander here spent one joyous afternoon happily emulating the flight patterns of aforementioned dynamic scenery, all the time blissfully oblivious to the fact that his modem companion was busy searching desperately around the airport for him during most of the connection. This may happen the first time or so when attempting modem play via **FS4**, thus the custom plane suggestion.

To get a little more technical, agree on a route to fly together as well. Choose speed, altitude, departure, destination, and patterns to fly should the planes lose each other. The latter is not difficult at the speeds and distances even the lowly Cessna can handle; there's a lot of sky out there, and not much in it to use for reference points.

For instance, if a plane loses sight of the other, it could fly a tight circle waiting for the other's return. The chat facility included in the modem play option has in my experience worked only intermittently, so if one player doesn't hear from the other for a bit, it's best to break the connection to



Right and above: sniping all the way down the line in Knights of the Sky

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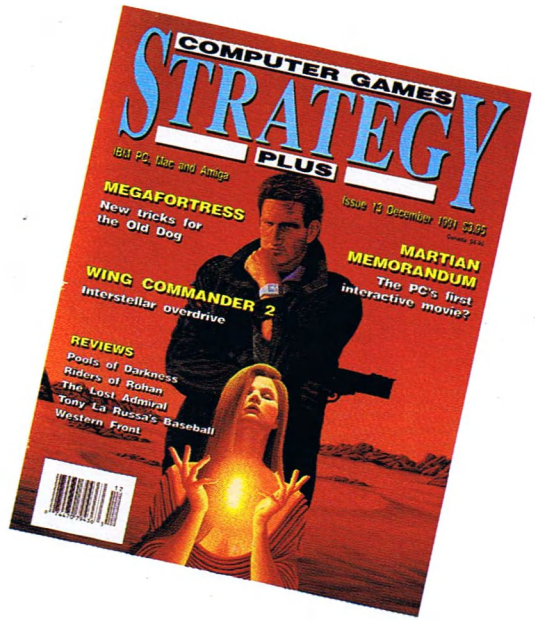

save some money, especially if it's a long distance phone call.

With **FS4**, as with the other multi-player sims we'll discuss, it's very important to try to match the two computers being used for play as closely as possible. The software is designed to handle differences in computing speed without breaking down, but some strange things can happen when two computers with radically different CPU speeds are linked together.

Knights of the Sky is probably the multi-player air combat sim of choice for the more aggressive types out there. As with **FS4**, both players can engage in milder occupations, such as a tour of the front, but the real fun comes from pitting different planes and pilots against each other in a gut-wrenching dogfight.

Right: Knights of the Sky, the multi-player air combat sim of choice

At the start of play, one person functions as the caller and the other waits as the answerer, as with **FS4**, but once the connection is made, each player chooses the plane he wishes to fight with at his end and then the fun begins.

Match play

Make sure to provide some sort of match-up between planes and each player's skills so that the connection will serve for a real dogfight instead of a typical American presidential campaign. A De Haviland 2 ain't gonna take out a Fokker Dreidecker unless the pilot of the former gets real lucky, or the pilot of the latter's busy watching the baseball game in the other room.

Similarly, if one player has just got **Knights** and the other's been practising with it for a year, the latter should go easy on the former if both friendship and the chance for future match-ups are part of the deal.

On the other hand, if you really hate somebody get them **Knights of the Sky** for their birthday and then spend the rest of the month sniping at them from a safe distance across the phone lines.

One of the nice things about **Knights of the Sky** is that it contains a built-in scoring system, which provides some kind of feedback on how each player has done in a dogfight (such things need to be imagined into being with **FS4**). Points are given for shooting down the opponent, and taken away for crashing into the ground (makes sense, doesn't it). There's also a chat feature, so that verbal taunts can become a vivid part of the battle.

Multi-player air combat can be a massive stress-reliever, and perhaps a means towards providing some minimal opportunities for group therapy at the office. In fact, if the office has a local area network of the right sort (Novell IPX Protocol compatible, NetBIOS users need not apply), **Falcon 3.0** might prove a better investment than hiring on some sort of high-falutin' management consultant.

Falcon 3.0 has provision for flying planes as either opponents or allies across the LAN, and either way, there's a very busy context going on even for the multi-player portion of the simulation, which should keep punch-drunk exhausted office workers engaged well beyond the end of lunch hour.

Some experimentation will have to take place with the multi-player feature, as it's not completely reliable yet, and can require some time for the initial data downloads to take place between machines; but if it can be made to work it can be amazing. The trickiest and least reliable aspect of the design so far is the multi-player options on an LAN; although up to six players can technically work as allies or opponents in a full campaign, there have been reports that this doesn't always work.

With all these simulations, the faster the modem used for play, the better. **Falcon 3.0** simply won't run with anything less than a 2400 baud modem, and the others are much more enjoyable at such speeds as well. Also, data connections aren't always perfect, as the scrambling of lines in connections to BBS's and networks proves; if something horrible seems to have started to happen during multi-player connection, the best policy is usually to log off and try again. Fortunately, with **Knights of the Sky**, one can simply end a round of play (by crashing, say) and choose 'fly again' to restart.

Multi-player flying and air combat should be a regular feature of all flight simulation designs. With the exception of **Knights of the Sky**, the modem play features of most designs seem tacked-on at best (the one featured in **Falcon 3.0** was planned as the heart of the beast in some ways, but the results suggest that Spectrum Holobyte's Electronic Battlefield is still quite a way off), and at worst are barely functional.

In the net

With the increasing variety of access to national and international networks, and the plunging price of modems, multi-play should become increasingly popular, as long as the software is there to support it. Networks are making it much easier to find opponents safely at any hour of the day or night any day of the week, thus overcoming the main objection against multi-play, that it requires too much pre-arrangement.

The simple points systems and such that characterize the present generation of multi-play air combat design could certainly be expanded into much more developed role-playing situations.

We can hope for it all, but only time will tell; meanwhile, what's out there will do, and is a must try for anyone who's never experienced the exhilaration of simulated person-to-person combat. ❑

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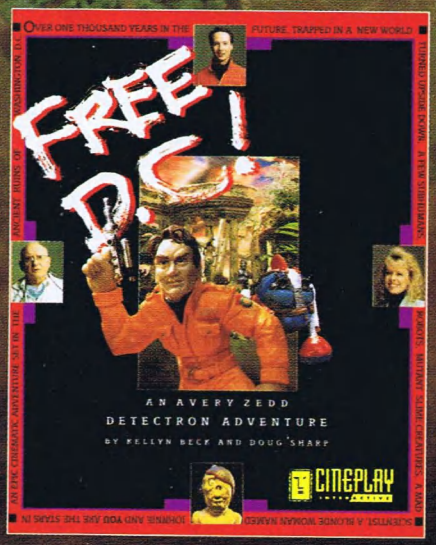
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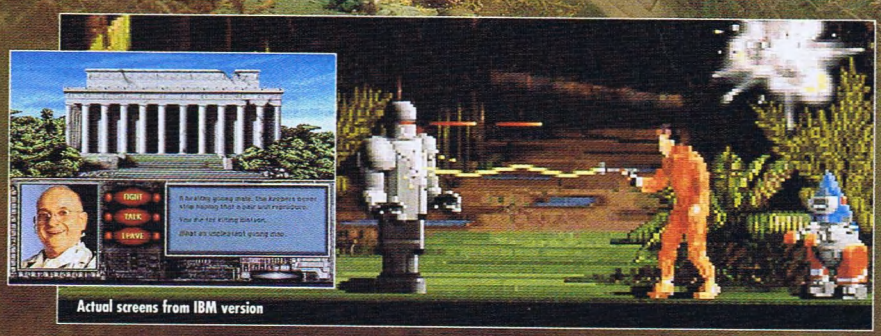

Actual screens from IBM version

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NEVERWIN

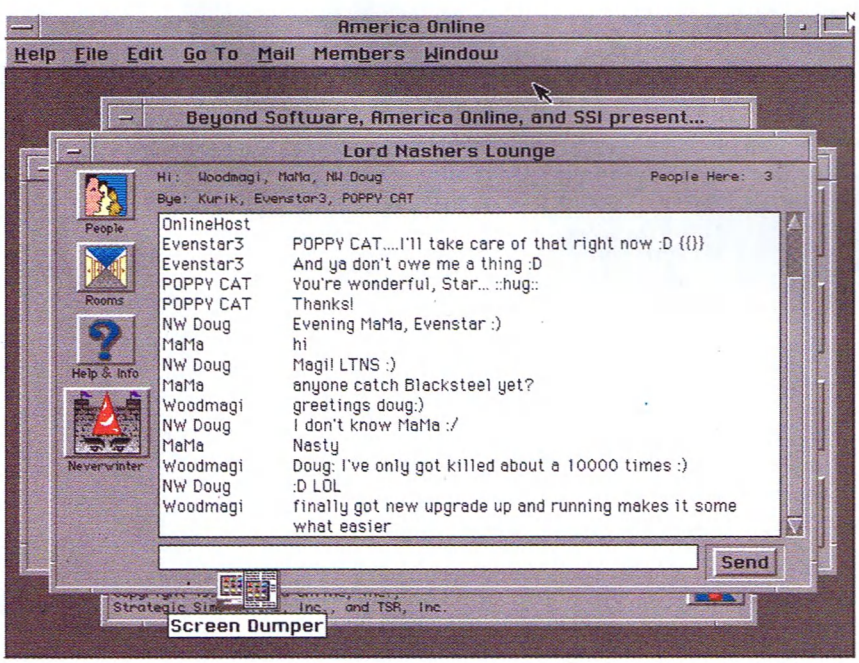
Big Mama goes on-line with Neverwinter Nights

Trouble on the homefront. Mama hasn't fed the dragon in weeks and the phone bill was hand delivered by grateful AT&T employees, all of whom owe this month's pension funding to my current pre-occupation... America OnLine (AOL) and its online game, **Neverwinter Nights**.

AOL is a graphical online information service that uses Microsoft's graphical user interface (GUI). Like other such services, there are forums and meeting rooms, messaging, e-mail, shopping, and downloadable software available. Unlike other services, **AOL** provides access to a fully interactive **AD&D** game, **Neverwinter Nights (NWN)**, a product of SSI and TSR.

NWN is an official **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons** gold box series game and is set in the Forgotten Realms, a region familiar to anyone who has played **Pool of Radiance**, **Curse of the Azure Bonds**, **Secret of the Silver Blades**, or **Pools of Darkness**.

All of the mechanics of **NWN** are the same as the other Forgotten Realms games. Character creation and available races and classes are the same, as are the character limitations. Game play is nearly identical. Nearly, but not quite! It is the *not quite* that sets **NWN** apart from all other games.


America Online
Help File Edit Go To Mail Members Window
Beyond Software, America Online, and SSI present...
Lord Nashers Lounge
Hi: Woodmagi, MaMa, NW Doug
People Here: 3
Bye: Kurik, Evenstar3, POPPY CAT
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Evenstar3 POPPY CAT....I'll take care of that right now :D {{}}
Evenstar3 And ya don't owe me a thing :D
POPPY CAT You're wonderful, Star... ::hug::
POPPY CAT Thanks!
NW Doug Evening MaMa, Evenstar :)
MaMa hi
NW Doug Magi! LTNS :)
MaMa anyone catch Blacksteel yet?
Woodmagi greetings doug:)
NW Doug I don't know MaMa :/
MaMa Nasty
Woodmagi Doug: I've only got killed about a 10000 times :)
NW Doug :D LOL
Woodmagi finally got new upgrade up and running makes it some what easier
Send
Inc., and TSR, Inc.
Screen Dumper

Lounge wizards

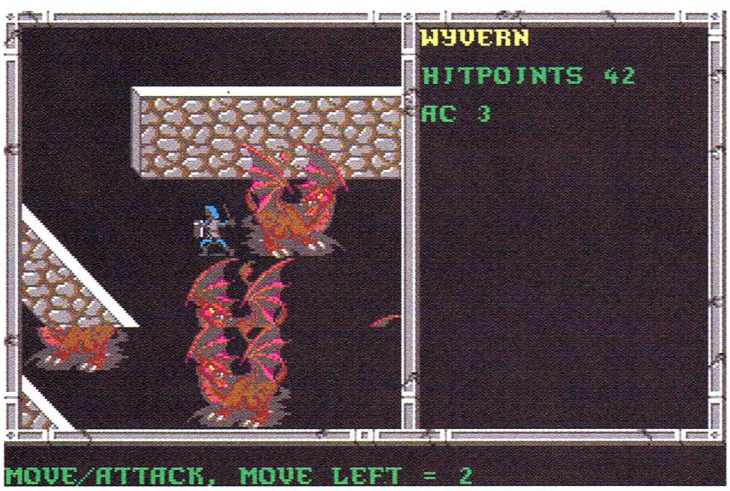
The moment the player steps out of Lord Nasher's lounge and into the game world, the difference is apparent. Conversations among other players begin to appear across the top of the screen. Joining the conversations is a simple matter of typing the text of the message and hitting the enter key. The player's name and the message appear as part of the text window at the top of the screen. Private messages can be sent to anyone, anywhere in the game, by typing the name of the player to receive the message, a colon, and the message. This is an excellent way to gather a group for adventuring, get help in a hurry, or to negotiate with other players for trading items and information.

An adventurer can choose to go it alone or to wait for a group to gather. When alone and in combat, it is not unusual to see the message 'need help?' flash in the text window. If the answer is yes, the author of the offer appears in the combat screen along with the formerly lonely adventurer, and the monsters are soon monsterburgers. The loot and experience points are distributed among the adventurers in the battle. If even one blow is landed, shares are awarded.

After such a battle, the newly introduced players will usually decide to link up and continue the adventure. This is done by using the VIEW command and choosing the FOLLOW option. When operating in this mode, the players will move together, enter battles at the same time, and share in the booty. When additional players join the group, they simply hook on to someone already following the leader.

A very nice feature of the game and the service is the availability of experienced players during the prime hours of game play. Several players with the designation

TER NIGHTS



NW before their screen names are on duty. One of them is stationed in the conference room, Lord Nasher's lounge, and one or more of them are out in the game world.

In addition to these realtime human cluebooks, there are maps and hints available in the Guild of Hero's library. There are several guilds that are functioning, and players can join a guild that has aims and members with similar interests.

Guild play adds another fantastic dimension to the game. Members of a guild help one another during game play and seek one another out during the tough quests. There are evil guilds as well as good, providing something for everyone.

Scott Gries, producer of **Neverwinter Nights**, oversees the game as an online dungeon master named Red Mage. In the guise of Red Mage, Scott has told Mama that an expansion of the game world is planned. Players will be able to catch a boat in Port Llast and set sail for further adventures in the soon-to-be discovered western islands. Then there will be new frontiers opening up to the east where restricted areas will allow only certain classes to enter and play. The eastern regions will be based on the **Savage Frontier** series of gold box games.

Scott also dreams of a full implementation of player v player melee combats, VGA graphics, higher character and spell levels, and more! Mama sez... this is a dream of a game already.

Change of character

AOL allows the user to have up to five different screen names, and **NWN** allows one character per screen name. This set of features permits the user to create and run up to five characters in the game, but only one character at a time can be operational. In order to change characters it is necessary to log-off and back onto the system under the new name. I tried this a few times and decided to stick to my original character, Mama.

Mama, the **NWN** character, is a paladin: lawful good, strong, wise and handy with weapons and armour. Mama's icon is a feisty fighter with silver armour, a platinum/carbide shield, an ebony sword and a lovely, silky, sky blue outfit. During the game, Mama has acquired many loyal followers, a bevy of admirers, and looks forward to returning soon.

The game software can be downloaded from America Online, or ordered online. All of the game materials are available as text files and shipment of the gold box itself takes about two weeks. Only one caution... **Neverwinter Nights** is addictive and at four dollars an hour it will take a lot of discipline to keep the monthly charges within reasonable limits. ❑

Designed by
Don L Daglow

Produced by
Scott Gries

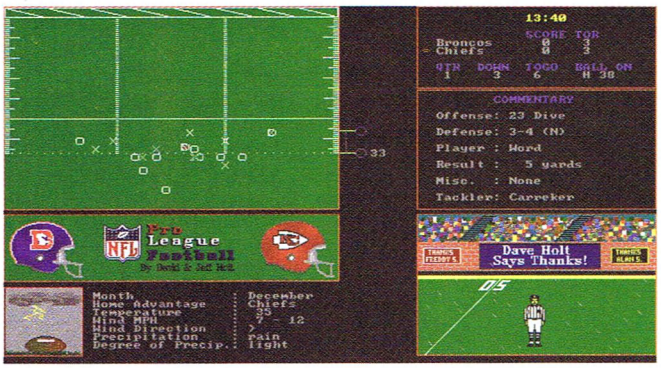
Published by
Quantum Computer Services, licensed from Strategic Simulations Inc

Systems
IBM PC

PC graphics
EGA, VGA

Supports
Hayes compatible modem; mouse

Notes
America Online charges are $8 an hour during prime time and $4 an hour evenings and weekends. Access via local access numbers (access charges apply)



Below: Pro League Football: high quality sim

THE SPORTS LOCKER

Joseph McCullough rings the changes

Most computer games – sports games in particular – succeed or fail on the quality of competition they provide to the player. Ten years ago it wasn't too hard to find the computer opponent's weaknesses. Once exposed, the computer was no match for an even mildly astute player. After the soft spot was located in a team's defence, the game became boring. Winning by ridiculous margins may have been fun for a while, but it got old after about a week.

The only time those tired old games were dusted off was when a friend came over to join in the fun. Instead of gripping competition, however, these meetings usually turned into friendship-threatening humiliations because of mis-matched player proficiencies. Still, human competition, no matter what the skill level, is better than playing another monotonous game against the computer.

On those rare occasions when opponents of equal skill are matched, the games succeeded wildly. It cannot be denied that quality human competition can make any game shine.

Today's games are programming wonders compared with those of the early years, but the thrill of besting a computer is still no match for the exultation one feels when winning a close game against a worthy human foe.

In a perfect world, each gamer would have his or her own gaming partner to summon any time to match wits on the silicon playing field. The last time I checked, the world wasn't perfect, so until it is we'll have to find another solution. The good news is a solution is already at hand. Virtual gaming perfection is only a modem call away.

Being there

Modem play falls into two categories: real-time and league play. Real-time gaming is, to coin a phrase, the next best thing to being there. Real-time modem play allows friends across town or across the country to play one another any time of the day or night without having to be in the same room.

Companies such as Spectrum Holobyte and Microprose got into the act early on when they programmed modem play into their combat flight simulations. These types of games can be found for all major computer gaming platforms. Sports game manufacturers have been slower to come to market with viable real-time products. In fact, only three sports games have been released which include this feature, and these are all for IBM and compatible computers.

Cunning stunt

Spectrum Holobyte's **Stunt Driver** was perhaps the first sports game released that offered head-to-head competition over the phone lines. Players could race one another around any of the game's pre-designed tracks, or custom tracks could be uploaded from one driver to the other.

Second to market was Micro Sports with its pair of high-quality football simulations – **Pro League Football** and **All American College Football**. Each game offered hundreds of teams to choose from and a plethora of offensive and defensive plays to call during the game. Once each coach has input his play selection, these numbers are transmitted over the phone lines to both computers. The computers then execute the offence and defence on a crisp VGA display.

The only thing missing from these ground-breaking simulations is a chat mode so that players can gloat after a key sack, big play, or forced turnover. Dave Holt, the game's designer, promises to add a chat mode for the next version.

It is hoped that more sports game manufacturers will include modem play in future releases. Holt is said to be working on a modem-capable baseball simulation, but we have come to expect that kind of support from his company. It's up to the other companies to meet his challenge.

When more games come to market, players will have more opportunities to find quality competition than ever before, thanks to the help of online information services such as Compuserve. Compuserve introduced an innovative product last year that allows members to use avoid costly long-distance charges by using the Compuserve network as the link between game players. Instead of paying long-distance charges to the phone company, members pay Compuserve

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Above and below: Pro League Football

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Players enter the modem-to-modem gamers lobby to seek an opponent, or arrange playing times by posting messages in the modem gamers' forum. When game time arrives, members exit their communications programs to DOS, and boot up their favourite modem-capable game. Compuserve responds to player commands and links the two ports on the network together. Once the link is made, real-time modem game play can begin.

As of this writing, **Stunt Driver** is the only sports simulation that can be played in the MTM Lobby, but as more modem games come to market, more will undoubtedly be adapted for play over this system.

League play is the other type of competition that has benefited from the growing popularity of modems and online information services. Computer sports leagues work like this: games enthusiasts who own the same software package agree to form a league. Members choose their teams and players via a drafting system similar to those used in professional sports. Once all the players have completed the draft, the league commissioner sets a schedule and determines the ground rules.

Each member is responsible for communicating a game plan to the commissioner outlining the strategic decisions to be made during the next game on the schedule. When game time arrives, the commissioner uses the software to determine the results based on member's game plans. He can then either simply publish the results, or publish the results and also distribute the game plans to all league members. The latter allows members to use their copy of the software to watch the game unfold.

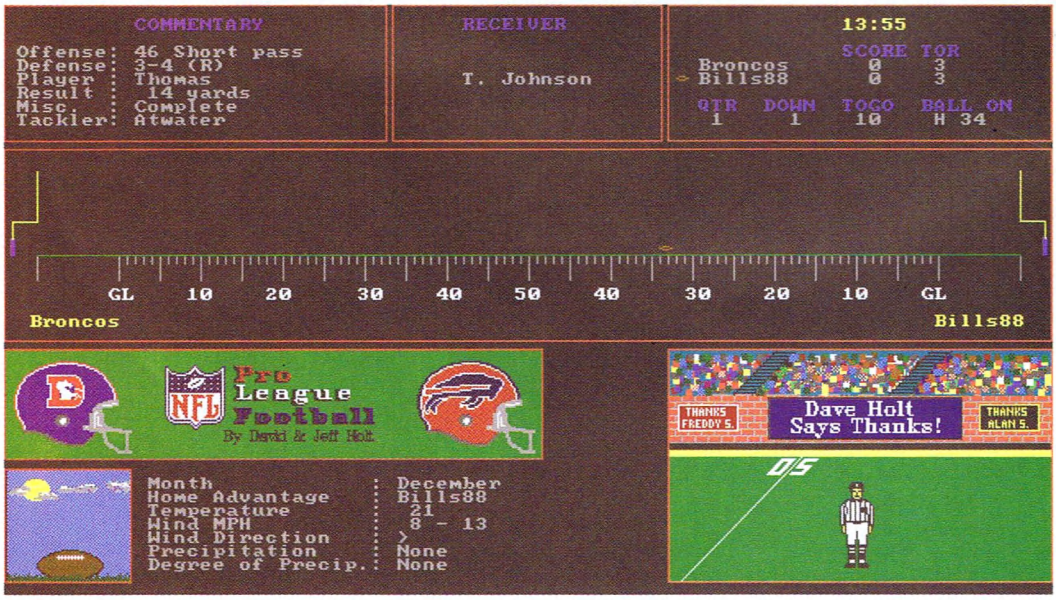
Mass exposure

Before modems became so ubiquitous, many computer sports leagues were played by mail. Now it seems that everywhere one logs on, a sports league is in place. Modems and large information services have not only facilitated league organization, but have exposed this type of gaming to hundreds of people.

An entire message and library section in Compuserve's Gamers' Forum was recently devoted to sports leagues. At any given moment one may find a football league based on **Micro Sports Pro League Football**, a baseball league for owners of **Earl Weaver Baseball II**, and a golf tournament for **Ultimate Golf** pros. Gamers' Forum sysops and section leaders act as commissioners for these leagues, and they do an excellent job of adding excitement to competition by encouraging trash-talking and hyperbole by the league participants. *USA Today*'s information service has also become a popular gathering spot for sports league enthusiasts. At $5.95 an hour, this service is less than half the price of Compuserve's Gamers' Forum, and has the added benefit of a close relationship with Dave Holt, designer of **Pro League Football**.

USA Today has a special area set up that includes all current statistics for NFL teams. Holt has designed special code into **Pro League Football** to accept these files. This allows league members to participate in the current NFL season as it happens.

Modem play is just beginning to evolve into the next big thing in computer gaming. If current trends continue, it won't be long before all top-of-the-line sports games include some sort of modem-play feature, either real-time or through a league facility. Many have said that a modem is the one peripheral you can add to your system which will give the greatest enjoyment. For the gaming enthusiast, this statement couldn't be more true. ❑



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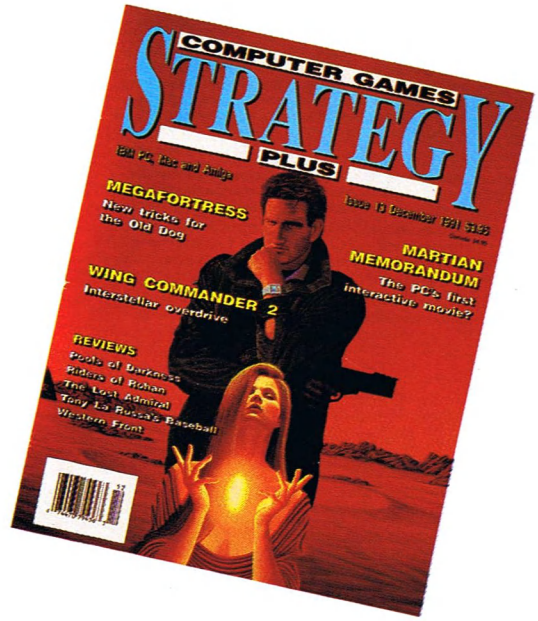

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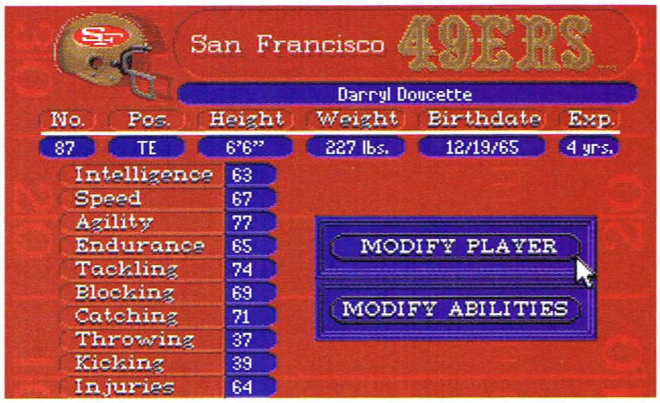

NFL

The land of make-believe

By John Harrington

Designed by
Distinctive Software

Published by
Konami

On the way over to *chez Strategy Plus* I checked through the manual to remind myself of the features **NFL** offered: official NFL endorsement, one or two player action, coach only or arcade version, league play, even a rookie draft and player trades between teams. Could this be it, I pondered, the fabled ultimate football game?

One by one my hopes for this game were shattered. Take the NFL endorsement. OK, the team names are familiar but none of the players are. Famous players can be 'replicated' using the player abilities editor, and to do this for all 46 players on all 28 teams should only take round about 14 000 hours.

Each player is rated out of 100 in 10 abilities, irrespective of whether an ability is relevant to that player's position. Thus, to soup up a defensive lineman's blocking skill or reduce his propensity to get injured merely requires a reallocation of the points redundantly allocated to his kicking, catching and throwing skills. It's an admirably lucid system but open to abuse.

As ever in a sporting simulation, the two-player head-to-head is a more absorbing affair than the human v computer contest. This is partly because the computer coach's artificial intelligence is all artifice and no intelligence. Play calling seems to be random during normal play and positively perverse during the two-minute drill, with time outs being called to give the opposition greater opportunity to rack up the score.

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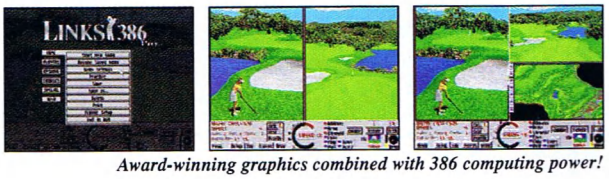

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The 'coach only' option is none too satisfying. Each team only has eight plays to choose from and four of these are the same for every team. There is a playbook editor which allows for customization of game plans but self-designed plays merely replace pre-programmed plays so that the playbook selection remains strictly limited.

On defence it is not always obvious which formation is meant to be good for run stuffing and which for pass coverage, and the notion of sending anyone on a blitz or keying on an offensive player seems to have passed the designers by.

The offensive options are just as ambiguous in that it is not immediately obvious which plays are designed for the possession game and which for long gains (but then I'm just an ignorant Limey, so what do I know?).

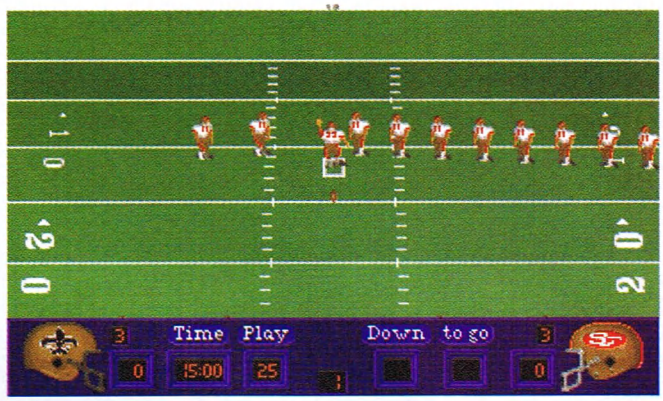
In the arcade version this is not such a problem as the coach controls one of the onfield players and therefore can exert a direct influence on the development of the play. Passing is effected by dropping the QB back, clicking through the eligible receivers and then releasing the ball when a receiver is open. It is one of the simpler systems, but suffers from the usual problem of receivers disappearing off the top of the screen.

The graphics are reasonably well defined and are seen to best effect in the superb frame by frame replay feature. In theory a coach can use the slow-motion replay to gauge how well his play selection is doing or to spot whether any of his players are overmatched, and substitute accordingly. Whether it is worthwhile going into such depth (and adding hours to the game length) is doubtful given the limited tactical options in the game.

The league play facility does not offer multi-player capability; it is strictly a solitaire option. I was not able to test out the draft process as this occurs at the end of a full season, but judging by the manual it looks like a simple process of sizing up each rookie's ratings in his prime abilities and remembering whether he is better than someone already on the books.

If I have been over critical of this game it is because the manual promised so much. Instead of the ultimate gridiron game I got **TV Sports Football** with knobs on.

When played in arcade mode it is a good introductory game for the casual gridiron fan. The campaign game (Road to the Super Bowl) should encourage repeated playing and, as the make-believe players pile up their statistics game by game, maybe, just maybe, it might be possible to forget that feeling of disappointment that these players aren't the real stars of the NFL. ❑



Systems
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Graphics
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Players
1–2 players

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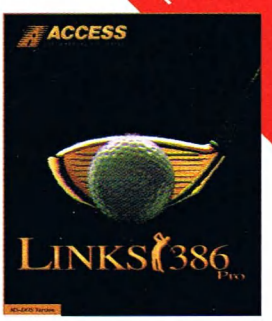

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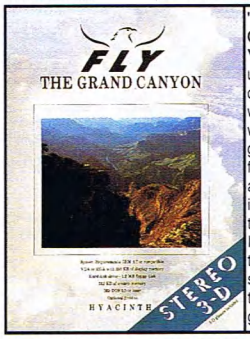

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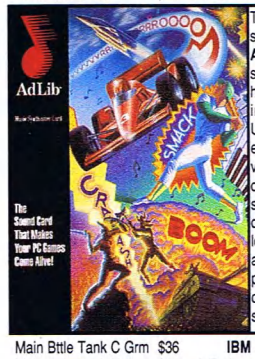

The **'ADLIB'** music synthesizer card by **ADLIB INC** adds sound capability to hundreds of existing PC games. Using its 11 different FM synthesized voices, it can reproduce almost any sound. The standard audio jack allows you to plug in any pair of headphones, boombox, or bookshelf speaker. **$59**

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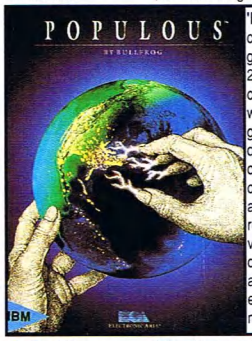

'POPULOUS' is a classic strategy game. You are 1 of 2 deities battling for control of the entire world. With ice, grassland, and desert there are over 500 worlds to conquer. Disasters are your divine prerogative - unleash volcanoes, earthquakes, swamps and floods on your enemies. Includes modem play. **$21**

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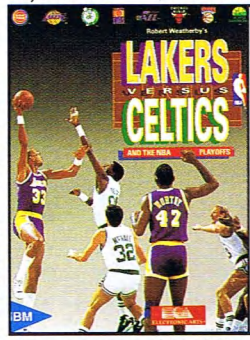

'LAKERS VS CELTICS' brings all the excitement of the NBA playoffs to your computer. Pick your favorite team and enter the first round. You control all the shots, passes, defensive plays, and coaching moves. Full court 5 on 5 action for 1 or 2 players. Includes East and West All Star teams. **$19**

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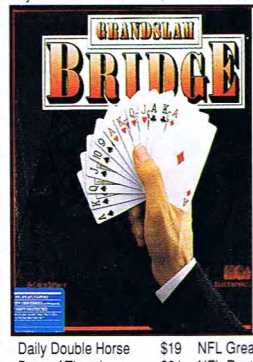

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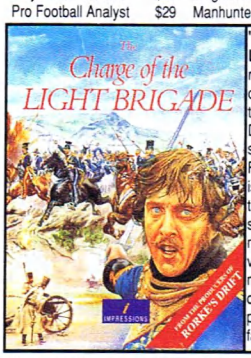
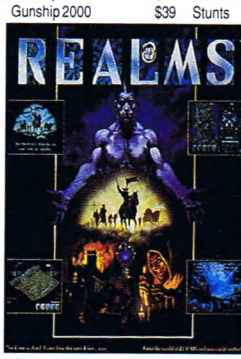
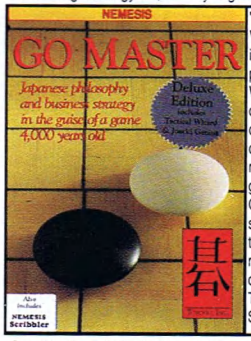


'CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE' recreates the battle of Balaclava during the Crimean War. Defend using the smaller British, French, and Turkish Forces or play the attacking Russians. Features animated figures, individual or group commands, two player option and an improved mouse interface. **$34**

'DREADNOUGHTS' is a surface fleet battle simulator. It recreates the look, specificatons, and tactics of fleet combat. Features 3D views, comprehensive manuals and sea charts, a potent English command parser, 1 or 2 player mode and computer controlled ships, gunnery and damage control. **$42**



'REALMS' is a strategy game in a fantasy setting. You can control 128 armies, each a thousand strong with definable battle formations and consisting of 6 distinct humanoid races. March your troops over 125,000 square miles of fractally generated landscape to obtain countless followers and gold. **$29**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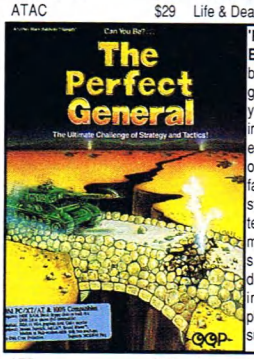
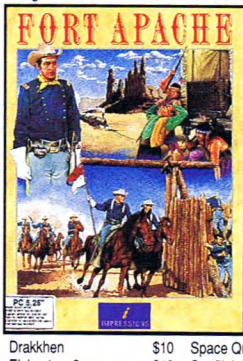
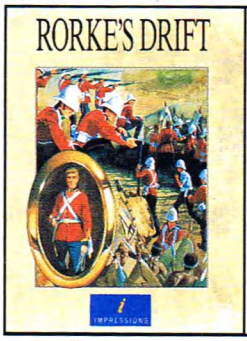


'PERFECT GENERAL' is a turn based ground war game. Features 12 years of play testing, VGA maps, easy to use mouse or keyboard interface, 14 scenarios, strong artificial intelligence, hidden movement, line of sight option, in depth player ranking system, 2 player, with modem support. **$34**



'FORT APACHE' lets you take charge of a detachment of cavalry troopers in the wild west. You are responsible for training them and bringing their combat abilities up to par. Features individual or group control, choice of weapons, a wide variety of missions, detailed troop stats, a large play area, & promotions. **$34**

The **'THUNDER BOARD'** is a sound board that is 100% compatible with Soundblaster and Adlib. It reproduces digitized sounds using an 8 bit DAC. Features include dynamic filtering, 11 Voice FM music synthesizer, sampling rate up to 22 KHz, microphone input, joystick port, and a 2 watt power amplifier. **$84**



'RORKE'S DRIFT' is a detailed simulation of the battle between 137 British soldiers & 4000 Zulu warriors that took place Jan 22 1879. You control each man, standing, sitting, prone, aiming, firing, reloading, running or walking. With 3D map, animated combat & movement mouse support & VGA. **$34**

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